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# Moral and Social Aspects of the Plays of Juan Ruiz De Alarcon

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MORAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE PLAYS OF  
JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCON

BY  
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

JUNE

1949

TO THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN  
SPOUSE OF THE HOLY GHOST  
AND  
SEAT OF WISDOM  
I HUMBLY DEDICATE THIS STUDY.

## VITA

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## PREFACE

Critics have often challenged the term "moral dramatist," contending that it cannot be in conformity with the purpose of the genre drama.

The theater, considered in its essence and its object, is directed to please and interest by the representation of human actions and sentiments and by the imitation of human passions, ideas and customs. Never at any time in the history of its development was its prime object any other than this. For this reason many argue that we cannot have a comedia of morals. As in any work of art, so in the drama we look for beauty, grace and style of expression. Likewise this pleasure and this interest cannot be complete if they do not embody a certain element of moral beauty or virtue.

The theater is not a school of morals and we may well assume that any dramatist who would attempt to write drama with this exclusive end in mind would defeat his purpose and only arouse the displeasure of his audience. On the other hand it is impossible to present human actions and human characters without producing in the minds of the spectators a moral effect of some degree. This effect can be good, inspiring the spectator to the practice and love of noble and sublime virtues, or it can be evil, inclining him to ignoble deeds and even to violent actions.

However, villainy, treason, perfidy and ignoble sentiments viewed in themselves alone are not dramatic. The same people who are prone to these acts, guided by natural instinct of justice and truth, receive them with a murmur of indignation when they are presented before them. Thus it is easy to see which road the laws and precepts of art point out to the author. Virtue, the principal object of the moral, is necessary in the dramatic as well as in the poetic. The dramatist must know how to unite the useful with the pleasing. If a dramatist wishes to produce great theatrical effects, he must speak to the heart of man and awaken in him natural moral sentiments.

With this conception of the comedia in mind we turn to the works of Ruiz de Alarcón to see in what way he can be called a moral dramatist and still fulfill all the requirements of the true dramatist. The writer will analyze his conception of the comedia as regards technique, characterization and ideas. She will endeavor to show in what respects his drama differed from the order established by Lope in regard to the "arte de hacer comedias" but at the same time remained in conformity with those fundamental principles.

To present a complete and accurate picture of the position and problems of the moral dramatist, the writer will briefly review the development of the Spanish drama up to the time of Alarcón and will present the social, literary and theatrical situations of the period.



## INTRODUCTION

When Juan Ruiz de Alarcón as a young man first came to Madrid in the year 1600, what was the condition of the Spanish theater and what place did it hold in the lives of the Spanish people of this capital city? Whence its development and to what extent was it regulated and influenced by social and courtly life in Madrid in the seventeenth century? In short, what were the problems facing this future dramatist seeking position and renown in Madrid at the beginning of the seventeenth century?

The answers to these and many similar questions are pertinent to a clear understanding of the position of Ruiz de Alarcón as an outstanding writer among the Golden Age dramatists.

The Spanish people were ever a gay, alert, pleasure-loving people and from earliest times they had sought inspiration for their recreation and enjoyment in the popular theater. Although extremely simple and crude in its beginnings, the theater had gradually developed by the seventeenth century to the position where it was the admiration of all Europe; it had arrived at its peak of prosperity, its most brilliant period of glory.

In order to appreciate more thoroughly this position of prominence, let us briefly review the unfolding of its dimensions through the years

prior to 1600, noting its spontaneous production from the soil of Spain, its gradual unfolding and its final growth into a majestic tree whose branches produced copious fruit even in foreign lands.

In Spain, as in certain other European countries, the drama had its origin in the Church liturgy and continued to develop along these lines. Beginning as early as the tenth century with simple and naive attempts in Latin to dramatize portions of the liturgy, the stream expands to a multitude of autos or misterios. At first, certain parts of the liturgy of the Mass were dramatized on occasions of special religious festivity, notably Christmas and Easter. During these festive seasons a brief dialogue, known as a tropus, was introduced into the Introit of the Mass, and this tropus was enacted by the clergy.<sup>1</sup> At the tropus in the Christmas Mass, priests playing the roles of shepherds and herald-angels assembled at a crib near the altar to chant the liturgy. This custom was first known in connection with the Easter services and consisted of an interview between the angel guarding the tomb and priests who came to seek the body of Our Lord. This idea was passed on to other monasteries and churches and was soon elaborated.

During the period from 900 to 1200 there was a constant development of this type of liturgical drama. More ambitious effects were attempted by laymen who joined the priests as actors. With the addition of comic

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<sup>1</sup> Young, W., Drama of the Medieval Church. New York, 1923. 50.

elements the presentation of these plays within the sacred edifice occasioned scandal; they were banished from the sacred edifice, and the next step was to present them in the open air or market place. There they were produced by semi-religious guilds.

Of this early Spanish liturgical drama, only a single short fragment called El auto de los reyes magos, written about the middle of the twelfth century, remains. It is a simple dramatic narrative of the journey of the three kings from the Orient, who, following the miraculous star, arrive at Bethlehem to adore the Infant Saviour. From the surviving fragment of 174 verses we gather the action was rapid, filled with realistic details typical of Castellian literature of the period, and showed an intention of characterization and an ingenuity of dialogue.

Little is known of the staging of these dramatic dialogues due to the lack of manuscripts, but we are aware of the fact that works of a similar nature must have existed in Spain at this time for we find special laws with reference to them in the Siete Partidas (1256-1263) of Alfonso el Sabio which contain certain items of interest to us. Clerics must neither witness nor participate in juegos por escarnios but are encouraged to act plays representing the Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Nin deben ser facedores de juegos por escarnio (satiricas de corta extension), porque los vengan a ver les gentes como los facen, et si los atroꝝ homes los facieren, no deben los clérigos hi venir, porque se facen hi muchas villanias et desaposturas, nin deben otrosi estas cosas facer en las eglesias, ante decimos que los deben ende echar deshonoradamente sin pena ninguna a los que los fecieren; ca la eglesia de Dios fué fecha para arar, et non para facer escarnios en ella. . . . Pero representaciones hi ha que pueden los clérigos facer, así como de la nascencia de nuestro Señor Jesucristo, que demuestra como el angel vino a los pastores et dixoles como era nacido, et atro si de su aparecimiento como le venieron los tres Reyes adorar, et de la resurrección que demuestra como fué crucificado, et resurgió al tercer día. Tales cosas como éstas que muevan a los homes a facer bien et haver devoción en la fe, facerlas pueden: . . . et non lo deben facer en las aldeas nin en los lugares viles, nin por ganar dineros con ello.<sup>2</sup>

Between the Auto de los reyes magos and the next preserved dramatic piece, Gómes Manrique's Representación del nacimiento de nuestro Señor, a period of more than 300 years elapsed in which these early dialogues developed steadily into more well constructed and detailed productions.

There are no fixed dates in which the liturgical drama and the juegos de escarnio or secular drama become contemporaneous in their development, for until about the end of the thirteenth century, the history of the drama is wrapped in almost complete obscurity.

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<sup>2</sup> Ticknor, Historia de la literatura española. New York, Houghton, 1891, Vol. I. 270.

During the late fifteenth century, slowly but feebly, there developed two schools of dramatic style. The first was that of Juan del Encina who is often called "the patriarch of the Spanish theater." Although his works were but simple, brief dialogues without dramatic action, nevertheless, their more complex structure and greater interest show considerable progress over the traditional liturgical drama. He diverted the old traditional elements into new channels by revivifying the liturgical drama with the Italian Renaissance pastoral. Encina did not bring the drama directly to the people, but by stressing the comic element secularized it and made it popular with the aristocracy in whose palaces and for whose amusement he wrote.<sup>3</sup> His works and those of his followers consist in many short eclogues, farces, autos and representaciones. They are partly secular and partly religious presenting as themes the birth of Christ, his worship by shepherds, comic scenes and love affairs of shepherds and rustics and their clashes with caballeros and town dwellers, the festivities of Holy Week or the Epiphany, and finally the celebrations of such events as births and victories in the lives of noble and royal families.

The other school of dramatists followed the theories of Torres Naharro who was the first in Spain to voice dramatic criticism and the first to legislate for the Spanish theater by laying down set rules

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<sup>3</sup> Ticknor, op.cit., Vol. I. 289.

and establishing models for the comedy of intrigue, the comedy of manners, and the romantic comedy.<sup>4</sup> He distinguished sharply between comedy and tragedy and prescribed that the drama be divided into five acts or jornadas<sup>a</sup> after the manner of the classics. The number of characters must be such that the play will not grow dull as a result of having too few, nor confusing because of too many. There should not be less than six nor more than twelve.<sup>5</sup>

However, Torres Naharro's one predominant fault lay in the fact that he had little respect for the Catholic Church and took great license by ridiculing the pope and the clergy, for which reason his works were castigated by the Inquisition.<sup>6</sup>

Among the annals of the courts and the private records of churches and monasteries we find scant records of representations of these early pieces.<sup>7</sup> Augustin de Royas, who dedicated most of his life to the theater and whose work "Viaje entretenido," (Madrid, 1614) is one of the best early authorities on the history of the theater, tells us something of the staging of these early pieces.<sup>8</sup> For the most part the plays consisted wholly of narration of past events. They usually represent an unspecified outdoor meeting of shepherds. The dress and

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<sup>4</sup> Cañete, El teatro español del siglo XVI. Madrid, 1885. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>6</sup> Ticknor, op.cit., Vol. I. 319. (f. 17).

<sup>7</sup> Pellicer, C., Tratado histórico sobre el origen y progresos de la comedia y del histrionismo en España. Madrid, 1804, Vol. I. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Ticknor, op.cit., Vol. I. 291.

small properties of the actors are such as belong to their occupations. Later scenes represented a spot in town before the dwellings of one of more of the principal characters.<sup>9</sup> Women inside are addressed through the windows, and the doors of the dwelling are used in summoning characters to the scene. Division into scenes was on the basis of the entrance of new personages.<sup>10</sup>

For all practical purposes, however, the history of the secular drama need date back no further than the middle of the sixteenth century. There is known no document which testifies to the existence of companies of actors charging public fees at the beginning of the sixteenth century. But it is certain that by the year 1534 public presentations must have been frequent, judging from an edict of the emperor of that year restricting excesses in dress.<sup>11</sup> Among the names of the outstanding comic actors of this period we find in the theatrical annals of Spain that of Lope de Rueda (1565). Cervantes had seen him in his youth and spoke of him many years afterwards.<sup>12</sup> From Cervantes' account of Lope de Rueda and his primitive theater and equipment we find that these early performances were given in a patio or corral or public plaza. The directors' equipment, which consisted of several ornamented skins, beards, wigs and shepherd's crooks

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- 9 Rennert, H. A., The Spanish Stage in the Time of Lope de Vega. New York, Hispanic Society of America, 1909. 11.  
 10 Williams, Ronald B., The Staging of Plays in the Spanish Peninsula Prior to 1500. University of Iowa Studies, 1935. 24.  
 11 Crawford, J.P.W., Spanish Stage Before the Time of Lope de Vega. Philadelphia, 1937. 112.  
 12 Romero-Navarro, M., Historia de la literatura español. New York, Heath, 1928. 196.

was all secured in a sack. The comedias were short dialogues between two or three shepherds and a shepherdess, interrupted at intervals by entremeses, which were short dramatic pieces of festive character. The main characters were ruffians, fools, shepherds and Buscayans; all were types, not individuals. The whole action took place in the center of the hallow or platform and clouds bearing angels or souls were lowered from above. A cheap blanket drawn by two cords served as a curtain behind which musicians sang ancient romances to the tune of the guitar.<sup>13</sup> The scene of these rude theaters was public squares, and the performances occurred whenever an audience could be gathered. In one of his plays, Lope de Rueda invites his "hearers only to eat their dinner and return to the square" to witness another. <sup>14</sup>

Varied are the works of Lope de Rueda, but his true fame as a dramatic writer is to be found in the short, humorous, rustic episodes called pasos which preceed the representation of a comedia, or are placed between the acts of it. Some insignificant event of ordinary life may serve as a theme and the value of these little pasos consists in their fidelity to the picture of real life, liveliness and true expression of human sentiments. The men and women are types of

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<sup>13</sup>

Rennert, op.cit., 18.

<sup>14</sup>

Ticknor, op.cit., Vol. II. 65.



lively people, the cowardly ruffian, the slandering groom, the foolish and good natured negress, the learned doctor and the cunning peasant, and last, but not least, the bobó or clown. In respect to language the pasos are a treasure of popular Spanish phrases and idioms of the sixteenth century.

Thus we have reviewed the feeble attempts to form and develop a national secular drama in Spain, and we have seen that for the most part they were but rude exhibitions in pantomime. The best dramatic representations were for three centuries in the hands of the Church, who was unwilling to relinquish them especially for secular and irreligious purposes. These latter were presented in the Churches before the people or were private entertainments given at court and in the houses of nobility.

As we have seen, Lope de Rueda was the first to bring them out into the public squares, and to adapt them to the tastes of the multitude.<sup>15</sup> But we have no record that the company of Lope de Rueda ever acted upon a permanent stage but rather was forced to resort to the temporary scaffolds erected by his own company of strolling players, who stayed but a few days in any one city, and while there was always the attraction of the lower classes of the people.

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<sup>15</sup> Cotarelo y Mori, Lope de Rueda y el teatro español de su tiempo. Madrid, 1901. 35-45.

There are records of occasional presentations of Italian comedias performed with much pomp, refinement, wealth of costume, and scenic luxury, but these were given only in special places and on occasions of certain festivities as coronations and marriages.<sup>16</sup> For the main part they were mere private Italian enterprises and did not conform with the general tenor of the Spanish *comedia*. They were apart and distinct from the plays held on improvised platforms in the market-places.<sup>17</sup> Although we do find in the Pragmatica of 1534 legislation against extravagances in scenic productions and sumptuous costumes of women, these decrees could not have applied to the rude productions in the public squares.<sup>18</sup>

The first approach to the establishment of permanent theatrical sites was in regard to the renting of court yards or corrales. This came about in connection with the enterprises of certain charitable organizations in Madrid who employed strolling companies of players to give presentations for the purpose of raising funds to support and promote their various charitable undertakings. In 1565 a number of charitable citizens founded a fraternity known as "Cofradía de la Sagrada Pasión," and soon petitioned the government for places for regular performances and the appropriation of the proceeds as a means of maintaining their

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<sup>16</sup> Sanchez-Arjona, Anales del teatro en Seville, 1898. 16-41.  
<sup>17</sup> Rennert, op.cit., 21.  
<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 19, 25.

hospitals for poor suffering women.<sup>19</sup> Two years later another fraternity, called "Cofradia de Nuestra Senora de la Soledad," joined them and expenses and profits were shared.<sup>20</sup>

The places designated for theatrical representations by the Cofradia de la Pasión were three: a square or corral in the Calle del Sol; another belonging to Isabel Pacheco, in the Calle del Principe, and a third in the same street-- a corral leased from one Burguillos-- which afterward passed into the control of the Cofradia de la Soledad.<sup>21</sup>

These corrales were at first open court-yards in the rear of which was a crude stage. The greater portion of the audience viewed the performances while standing in the open center exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather, while the more fortunate ones viewed the scene from neighboring windows and roofs. Gradually an awning was extended over the stage to prevent exposure to the sun and rain.

Records are to be found in the works of Pellicer and Dr. Perez Pastor of many representations given in these corrales by various visiting Italian players, among the number were the names of theatrical managers as Ganassa, Alonso Rodríguez, Juan Granado and many others.<sup>22</sup>

Sundays and feastdays were at first the designated times for these performances, but due to growing public demand, they were extended to afternoon weekday performances, but the audiences were frequently so

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<sup>19</sup> Pellicer, C., op.cit., Vol. I. 43-44.

<sup>20</sup> Rennert, op.cit., 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>22</sup> Rennert, op.cit., List in Appendix A, 345.

small that the profit to the religious societies and hospitals frequently amounted to only eight or ten dollars each time.<sup>23</sup>

All performances of the secular drama continued to take place in these corrales for some time until the Cofradías erected their own permanent theaters, the first one in the Calle de la Cruz in 1579, and the other in the Calle del Príncipe in 1582.<sup>24</sup>

Pellicer gives the following description of this second famous theater of Madrid, the Corral del Príncipe:

"A platform or stage was built, a green room, raised seats (gradas) for the men, portable benches to the number of ninety-five, a gallery for the women, stalls and windows with iron gratings, passageways, and a roof to cover the gradas. Finally the patio was paved and an awning was stretched over it which protected against the sun, but not against the rain." Four stairways were also erected, "one to ascend to the women's gallery, with its balustrade of brick and plaster, its wooden steps and its partitions of plaster around the lower part, and the same above, so that the women who went up the said stairway and were in the balcony could not communicate with the men." In addition three other stairways were built, "ascending to the seats of the men [in the galleries?] and to the green room (vestuario), and also a stall or box in the corral, whereby women entered to a window which looked upon the stage."<sup>25</sup>

With this may be contrasted the description given by Schack of the corrales or theaters of that period:

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Pellicer, C., op.cit., Vol. I., 56.

24

Rennert, op.cit., List in Appendix A., 345.

25

Ibid., 40.

The corrales were . . . court-yards where the backs of several houses came together. The windows (ventanas) of the surrounding houses--provided, as is the Spanish custom, with iron railings or latticework, and then called rejas or celosias--served as boxes or stalls; a much larger number of these windows than originally existed in the buildings were especially constructed for this purpose. If these boxes were situated in the upper stories, they were called desvanes (attics); the lowest row of windows above the ground, however, were called apostentos, a name that, in a wider sense, seems also to have been applied to the desvanes. These apostentos (apartments or rooms) were really spacious rooms, as the name implies. The windows were, like the houses to which they belonged, sometimes the property of others, and if not rented by the fraternities, were entirely at the disposition of their owners, who, however, had to pay annually a specified sum for the privilege of seeing the plays from them. Beneath the apostentos was a row of seats, raised like an amphitheater, and called gradas; in front of these was the patio, and nearest the stage, stood rows of benches called bancos, presumably also under the open sky, like the patio, or protected only by a canvas covering. The gradas were under a projecting roof at the sides. In the rear of the corrales, i.e., in the part furthest from the stage, was the gallery set apart for women, especially of the lower classes, and called the cazuela or stewpan, also called corredores de las mugeres or gallery for women. The more refined women patronized the apostentos or desvanes.<sup>26</sup>

The stage itself, in the two principal theaters of Madrid, was very simple, being only a small slightly raised platform set up at one end of the yard. According to Schack's account there was no drop curtain prior to 1587, but Rennert who has made a complete study of all stage directions of Lope de Vega's plays is of the opinion that Lope used one in his plays.<sup>27</sup>

A gallery existed at the back of the stage, which served to represent a house, a wall, or a mountain. At times no attempt was made to represent a wall but it was left to the dialogue to make known to the spectators that a wall had been sealed. A window located above the stage floor was a common accessory especially in the comedia of intrigue. Often a curtain was hung in front of the balcony or gallery, enabling characters to appear at different places and this device often served the purpose of a window.<sup>28</sup> Likewise a balcony was improvised in the same manner, as there was technically no difference between a gallery, a wall, or a balcony. A ladder was used for the purpose of scaling a wall or ascending to a balcony.

Entrance to the stage was by two doors at the back. The dressing room or vestuario occupied the two sides of the back of the stage and actors could enter upon the stage directly from the vestuario.

As a general rule there was little use of stage scenery until the second third of the seventeenth century when Italian stage carpenters

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27 Rennert, Staging of Lope de Vega's Comedias, in Review Hispanique, Vol. XV, 1906. 475.  
 28 Ibid., 464.

introduced more elaborate scenic effects such as the cave used in La Cueva de Salamanca<sup>29</sup> by Alarcón, or perhaps a castle, a garden, a throne, a shrine, boats, tables and tents. It has even been recorded that horses were used on the stage during the time of Lope de Vega.<sup>30</sup>

Very rarely was there any indication of place or action or change of scene, but rather it was left entirely to the imagination of the spectator. The Spanish audience went to hear the play, not to see it. In order to change a scene it was usually enough for actors to leave the stage through one exit and enter through another. Occasionally the dialogue gave some indication of place as "A Burgos llegado habemus", or "Ésta es la puente del Tormeo", but the stage properties remained the same regardless of a shift of action, as the scant stage machinery was not movable.

Price of admission in the beginning was generally half a real; afterwards it was doubled and more. The rent of the bancos was more and the rent of the high aposentos was a costly luxury costing often as much as seventeen reales.<sup>31</sup> Some aposentos were named for their patrons as: Pastrana, Carpio, or by their situation as Rincón or Esquina. La Villa de Madrid had an apósito in each theater and paid three hundred ducats a year for them. A celosia in the Teatro de la Cruz cost the

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29 Northup, G.T., An Introduction to Spanish Literature. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1936. 274.

30 Rennert, Staging of Lope de Vega's Comedias, op.cit., 473.

31 Ibid., 135.

Duke of Lerma one hundred ducats annually.<sup>32</sup> It was deemed a distinction to have free access to the theater, and many tried to obtain it even by foul means. Those who paid at all paid twice -- at the outer door, where the manager collected his claims, and at the inner one where an ecclesiastic collected what belonged to the hospitals.<sup>33</sup>

In this state the Spanish drama and theater continued for several years with very few changes or outstanding leaders with the exception of Juan de la Cueva (1550-1620) who labored hard to shape the future of the comedia and to unify it. He reduced the number of acts to four and enriched dramatic versification by employing a variety of meters. About 1609 he wrote his "Ars poetica" in which he boldly took issue with classical drama of the ancients and the Italians. He found it tiresome and unsuited to modern conditions. He outruled the unities of time, place and action, and thereby set an example for his followers.<sup>34</sup>

If we now look back over the claims of the Spanish theater from the time of the eclogues of Juan de la Encina, in 1492, to the appearance of Lope de Vega, we shall find, not only that the number of dramas was small, but that they had been written in forms so different and often so opposed to each other as to have little consistency or authority and to offer no sufficient indication of the channel into which the Spanish drama was to flow. Except for Lope de Rueda no author for the

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<sup>32</sup> Pellicer, C., op.cit., Vol. I., 98-100.

<sup>33</sup> Rennert, op.cit., 113.

<sup>34</sup> Romero-Navarro, op.cit., 200-201.



theater had enjoyed any considerable popularity. However, after his death, Lope de Vega was to have a free and open field. It was he who was destined to be the founder of the National drama, for which he fixed definite norms which were to be the basis of the Spanish Drama thereafter.

From earliest manhood, Lope was attached to the theater. While in the service of the Duke of Alva he came into close contact with many of the outstanding Italian managers and actors who were then frequent visitors at the court of Spain. While serving a penalty of exile in Valencia where Juan de la Cueva had made some feeble attempts at founding a national theater, Lope began his public dramatic career in the theaters of that city.<sup>35</sup> At the age of twenty-eight he returned to Madrid in 1590 and from that time on became well known in the capital as a dramatic writer.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately we have but few of his earlier efforts. He seems to have begun upon the old foundations established by his predecessors, chiefly the eclogues and moralities. He took the theater in the state in which he found it; and instead of attempting to adapt it to any previous theory, or any existing models, whether ancient or recent, he cast aside the rules of the three unities, collected the elements that were floating about and used them freely only in so far as they suited his purpose. He made it his great object to satisfy the popular audiences

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<sup>35</sup> Ticknor, op.cit., 230.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 230.

of his age. In his "Art of Writing Plays" and in the Preface to the twentieth volume of his dramas he avows distinctly that this was the first requisite of the Spanish theater and the prevailing purpose with which he labored for the theater.<sup>37</sup>

In Madrid he found little to work with except two rude theaters and a dramatic taste being formed in the character of the people. This was enough for him for he knew well how to win the general favor and how to build it up and strengthen his position as the leading dramatic poet of his time.

Among his early recorded plays we find a great variety of dramatic forms and a diversity of spirit, tone and structure, which was intended to humor the uncertain cravings of the popular taste of his day. All of them were divided into three acts and their subjects ran from the deepest tragedy to the broadest farce, and from the most sublime mysteries of religion down to the loosest episodes of common life. Their style embraces every change of tone and measure known to the poetical language of the country.<sup>38</sup>

While they all run into each other and intertwine, it is difficult to distinguish the limits of each class; yet there are some definite elements for class distinction.

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37 Morel-Fatio, "Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo," en Bulletín hispanique, III, 375. trad. into English by W. T.

Brewster, The New Art of Writing Plays, New York, 1914. 15.  
 38 Vossler, Karl, Lope de Vega y su tiempo. Madrid, 1935. 25-35.

The first of the classes which Lope invented is one in which his own genius seemed most to delight, and one which proved most popular in the Spanish theater, namely the "Comedias de capa y espada" or "Cloak and Sword Dramas." They took their name from the circumstance that their principal personages belonged to the genteel portion of society which at that time wore cloaks and swords--excluding those dramas in which royal personages appear and those which are devoted to common life and the humbler classes. Their underlying principle is gallantry, the Spanish gallantry of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain.<sup>39</sup> The story almost always contains an underplot and parody on the characters and adventures of the principal figures formed by servants and other inferior personages. The titles of plays of this class are often taken from the old Spanish proverbs that were always popular and that sometimes seemed to have suggested the subject of the drama itself: "Dineros son calidad", "La hermosa fea", or "La boba para los otros y discreta para si".<sup>40</sup> Duels, murders and assassinations are frequent in them but they are not tragedies for they always end happily. They contain passages of humorous and sentimental dialogue, spoken by the lower characters of wit and buffoonery.<sup>41</sup> All this was new on the Spanish stage, as well as the manners, tone and costume.

To the second class belong that group of dramas called "Comedias Heroicas" or "Historical Comedies". The chief difference between this

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<sup>39</sup> Ticknor, G., op.cit., 242-243.  
<sup>40</sup> Romero-Navarro, op.cit., 320-325.  
<sup>41</sup> Vossler, K., op.cit., 40-50.

and the last class is that they bring on the stage personages of higher rank, such as kings and princes, and that they generally have an historical foundation, or at least historical names, and their tone is grave, imposing and even tragical. Anything historical may furnish their subject from the earliest history of Greece and Rome to the events of their own time, and especially the ballads and chronicals of Spain itself. In many respects they were similar to the first class having the same intriguing stories and underplots and the same comic caricatures to relieve their serious parts. But in all these historical dramas, regardless of place or time of action, Spanish manners, customs, and ideas predominated rather than those of the historical period.

At other times, Lope swung in the other direction and created a class or variety of drama founded on common life in which the chief characters belong to the lower classes of society but the plots of intrigue are the same.

Thus he united all the elements of life, the spiritual and the religious, the social and the ethical, the erudite and the popular.<sup>42</sup> All three forms were spontaneous productions of Lope's own genius, modified slightly by what he found already existing and principally by the taste and will of the audience for which he wrote. But neither he nor his audience were able to dictate all. The Catholic Church,

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<sup>42</sup> Pfandl, Ludwig, Historia de la literatura nacional española en la edad de oro. Barcelona, 1933. 442-446.

always a guiding force in Spain, and especially powerful during the reign of the Catholic monarch Philip II, raised a voice of protest against the immoralities and obscenities of the theater of the time and the dissoluteness of the actors and actresses. Many and various decrees were issued during the years 1598, 1600, 1603, 1608 and 1615, for the reformation of the comedias.<sup>43</sup> As a result of one decree the theaters were closed for two years.<sup>44</sup> Lope was compelled to accommodate himself to the new state of things and seems to have done it easily for he was no less skilled in the art of the religious drama. Thus he produced a form of entertainment which, while it might satisfy the popular audiences of the capital, would avoid the rebukes of the Church. These entertainments were known as "Autos Sacramentales" and had as their subjects many episodes from the Sacred Scriptures, from the miracles and sufferings of the saints. Although less wild, they were just as intriguing and entertaining as the stories of Spanish gallants and heroes.

Through all these various classes there were definite underlying principles which made the theater of Lope distinctive and characteristic. As a first principle all interests were made subordinate to the interest of the story, even the characters who are at times nothing more than standing masks. The latter are all cast in a certain mold and belong to the number of galanes or heroes, examples of all love, all honor and

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<sup>43</sup> Rennert, H., op.cit., 206-228.

<sup>44</sup> Pellicer, C., Origen del Teatro, Madrid, 1804, Vol. I., 142-148.

extreme jealousy, damas or heroines, no less loving and jealous but more rash and heedless, brother, father or old man ready to defend the honor of the heroine with blood. They are merely fixed points around which different actions with their different incidents are made to revolve. In the same way dialogue is used chiefly to bring out plot and not characters. He was the innovator of the element of the underplot in which the graciosos and graciáas play an important part. In fine the main purpose of his drama is to depict real Spanish life but at the same time "to content and please the public though the rules of art may be strangled by it."<sup>45</sup>

So great was his fecundity and so vast the number of his plays that they filled the theaters both of the capital and the provinces, and so great and extraordinary was the impulse which he gave to dramatic representations that though there were only two companies of strolling players at Madrid when he began, there were about the period of his death no less than forty, employing nearly a thousand actors.<sup>46</sup>

This was the situation of the Spanish Theater; this was the idol of the people of Madrid, the dictator of the "arte de hacer comedias", the rival with whom the young Juan Ruiz de Alarcón was to struggle when he sought dramatic prestige in Madrid in the first years of the seventeenth century.

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Lope de Vega, "Arte Nuevo", Obros Vol. IV, 412.  
 Ticknor, G., op.cit., 318.

## CHAPTER I

### DON JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCÓN - STUDENT AND LAWYER

In Mexico was formed and unfurled the youth of Ruiz de Alarcón. Born about 1581<sup>1</sup> of Spanish Creole parents, his first contacts with life were amidst the surroundings of the small mining district of Tlacho, a village which the Spanish call Tacho y Tasco, about twenty-three leagues southeast of Mexico City.<sup>2</sup> Very little is known of the private life of Alarcón except the bare facts of chronological data which can be ascertained from Church, municipal and university records. Although he has left us no personal letters or autobiographical material, we can derive much information relative to his personal character from his own works in which he makes frequent reference to his own person and condition.

His father, Pedro de Alarcón, was superintendent of the mines of Tlacho for many years, and consequently lived in rather humble circumstances.<sup>3</sup> But aside from this fact, it can be assumed from an examination

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- 1 Rangel, Nicolás, Noticias biográficas del dramaturgo Mexicano D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza, in Boletín de la Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico, November, 1915. (hereafter referred to as Rangel II), 5.
  - 2 Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza. Mexico, Andres Botas, 1939. 19.
  - 3 Reyes, Alfonso, Ruiz de Alarcón. Madrid, 1918. XX.

of their marriage certificate,<sup>4</sup> that both parents were held in repute in the village. Among the names of the witnesses there recorded are such prominent personages as Doctor Luis de Villanueva, Magistrate of the Real Audience of Mexico, Francisco de Velasco, brother of the second Viceroy of Mexico and Luis de Velasco y Castella, Viceroy of Peru and later Marquis of Salenos and President of the Council of the Indies in Spain.<sup>5</sup>

Both parents were of distinguished and noble origin, to which Alarcon makes frequent reference in his works, especially in his play Los favores del mundo, which was probably written for the express purpose of making known the names and deeds of his valorous ancestors. His father was descended from García Ruiz de Alarcón and in this play Garci-Ruiz, a figure of the ancestor of Alarcón, is presented to us as a Champion of the faith of Christ, valiant warrior and conqueror of the Moors of Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Yo, que en la africana tierra  
Tantos moros he vencido;  
Yo, que por mi espada he sido  
El asombro de la guerra,  
Y que en tan deversas partes  
Fijé a pesar del pagano

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4 "México, domingo 9 de Marzo de 1572. Partida de Matrimonio de los padres de Alarcón. Libro I de Matrimonios de españoles (1568-1574), fol. 59. 1<sup>a</sup> partida. Archivo parroquial del Sagrario de la Catedral Metropolitana de México." Published by Fernandez y Guerra in the Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia, Spain, February, 1903.  
5 Rangel, op.cit., in Boletín de la Biblioteca Nacional de México. December, 1915. (hereafter referred to as Rangel III). 63.  
6 Ibid., 65.



Y el hereje, con mi mano  
 Catolicos estandartes,  
 ----- ¿ Es bien  
 Que esté deshonrado quien  
 Tantas honras os ha dado? 7

Frequent reference is made in his works to the name "Mendoza" which no doubt has special reference to his mother Dona Leonor de Mendoza, daughter of Hernando de Mendoza and of Maria de Mendoza who were inhabitants of the mining district of Tasco before 1572. On examining the records of the early conquistadors and first settlers of this region dating between 1540 and 1550 there is found the name of one Alonso de Mendoza who was sent to New Spain by Cortez to the site of Tenochtitlan.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the mother of Alarcon might have been of this origin but at any rate it is quite certain from the works of the author that the name Mendoza was of noble and illustrious origin, of great renown in Spain, and that he regarded his mother as a "mujer noble y principal."

It is a common feeling that Juan de Mendoza of Las paredes oyen, the author's most autobiographical work, and Juan Ruiz de Alarcon are one and the same person. The author again makes reference to these illustrious names in La verdad sospechosa when speaking through the

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7 Hartzenbusch, Juan Eugenio, ed., "Comedias de Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza," Biblioteca de Autores Españoles. Madrid, 1925. X<sup>Pl</sup>. (hereafter this collection and volume number will be understood when reference is made to the works of Alarcon and designated by the letters BAE.)

8 Jimenez Rueda, Julio, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y su tiempo. Mexico, 1939. 13.

mouth of the servant Camino he says that Dona Lucrecia merits Don Garci-Ruiz for a spouse because his father was "Luna" and "Mendoza" was his mother.

En cuanto á ser principal,  
no hay que hablar; Luna es su padre,  
y fue Mendoza su madre,  
tan finos como un coral. 9

And also in the same play, Don García replies to his father, Don Beltran, that if deeds give nobleness "tambien la da el nacimiento."<sup>10</sup>

Again Don Felix gives Doña Clara to understand that he has right to court her because through his veins runs the blood of the house of the Manrique.

La casa de los Manrique  
tan principal como antigua  
me dió el nombre que me ilustra 11  
Y la sangre que me anima.

Always was Alarcón proud of the noble lineage of his family and thus we see him making continual reference to it throughout his works. The names Guzman, Luna and Mendoza form as it were a cult of nobility with whom he is continually preoccupied. Abreu-Gomez is of the opinion that Alarcón used this repeated reference in opposition to an opinion prevalent among Spaniards of that time, that natives of New Spain were of an inferior caste.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, however, we must also bear

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<sup>9</sup> La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 1. BAE. 328.

<sup>10</sup> La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 9. BAE. 329.

<sup>11</sup> Mudarse por mejorarse, Act I, 13. BAE. 104.

<sup>12</sup> Abreu-Gomez, E., Ruiz de Alarcón, Bibliografía crítica. Mexico, 1939. 32.

in mind that it was not uncommon at this time for writers, for the purpose of ostentation, to make frequent claims to noble ancestry. We observe it in Lope de Vega and note that he exaggerated the quality and antiquity of his ancestors, even to the point of claiming relationship with no less than Bernardo de Carpio.

Educated in Mexico in the first courses in grammar and law he early showed an aptitude to aspire to the degree of bachelor of law. It is quite probable that he obtained his early education in one of the Jesuit colleges of New Spain, perhaps the most ancient and celebrated College of San Ildefonso, where some three hundred of the youth of New Spain were then pursuing courses<sup>13</sup> in the humanities, philosophy, theology, and canon and civil law. Being well instructed in the grammar and structure of Latin and Greek according to the Jesuit tradition of instruction, he undoubtedly translated and knew well the works of the early Latin and Greek writers and was early taught the eloquence of speaking. It is recorded that from the beginning of June 1596 to August 8, 1598<sup>14</sup>, Alarcón completed three courses of law at the University

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<sup>13</sup> Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza. Madrid, 1871. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Mexico, 1598. REGISTRO DE LOS TRES CURSOS DE CANONES QUE HIZO ALARCON EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE MEXICO DE JUNIO 1596 A 8 DE AGOSTO 1598.

Cursos de todas Facultades desde el año de 1597 hasta el de 1603. En la letra J. Archivo de la Universidad de México. Rangel, Nicolás, Los estudios universitarios de D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza, in Boletín de la Biblioteca Nacional de México, March-April, 1913. (hereafter referred to as Rangel I.) 2.

of Mexico City, and that he concluded the fourth on May 5, 1599,<sup>15</sup> and the fifth from October 18, 1599 to April 15, 1600.<sup>16</sup>

In this year and now at the point of obtaining the bachelor of law degree, Alarcón left Mexico to complete his studies in the University of Salamanca, because he preferred to receive his degree from this school of greater prestige. For this end he undertook a journey to ancient Spain in the fleet of Peru y Tierra from Havana, January 8, 1600.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of May he arrived in that ancient city of Seville and from there journeyed on to Salamanca.

Due to the humble position of his parents, they could not have made this journey possible, but it is believed that he owed the trip to the patronage of the Alderman of Seville, Gaspar Ruiz de Montoya, a relative of his, who had established a fund for pensioning poor

<sup>15</sup> México, 5 de mayo de 1599. PRUEBA TESTIMONIAL DE QUE ALARCÓN HIZO EL CUARTO CURSO DE CANONES EN PRIMA Y DECRETO EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE MEXICO.

Libro de cursos de todas las Facultades (1597-1603). Archivo de la Universidad de Mexico. Rangel I., op.cit., 7.  
<sup>16</sup> México, 11 de abril de 1600. PRUEBA TESTIMONIAL DE QUE ALARCÓN LEYO DIEZ LECCIONES PARA EL GRADO DE BACHILLER EN CANONES EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE MEXICO.

Libro de cursos de todas las facultades (1597-1603). Archivo de la Universidad de Mexico. Rangel I., op.cit., 7.  
<sup>17</sup> Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 23.

students. Of this pension Alarcón was a beneficiary in the sum of 1650 reales annually<sup>18</sup> which enabled him to continue his studies at Salamanca. The terms of the grant are unknown, but it is possible that it was renewed annually.

Due perhaps to an accident or to the course of nature Juan was a hunchback, deformed and of uncomely appearance. Thus it seems fitting that his family should make every effort to help him procure with his genius what nature had denied him, and thus to aid him to overcome the fatal influence of this deformity.

Accordingly, therefore, he registered at the University of Salamanca on October 18, 1600, where he presented his documents of accredited studies, demonstrated his abilities and after performing certain preliminary exercises was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Canon Law on the twenty-fifth of October, 1600.<sup>19</sup> Inspired with ambition and courage for higher honors, he immediately set about to qualify for the degree of Bachelor of Civil law which was conferred on him December 3, 1602 by Dr. Juan de Leon in the presence of witnesses, Gregorio Fernández de Toledo, two beadles and the secretary.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Marin, Rodríguez, Nuevos datos para la biografía del ensigne dramaturgo D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Madrid, 1912. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Rangel I, op.cit., 9.

<sup>20</sup> Fernandez-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 26.

Salamanca, 25 de octubre de 1600. REGISTRO DEL BACHILLERATO EN CANONES DE ALARCON EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA.

Libro de bachilleramientos de todas las Facultades (de 22 de abril 1598 a 1605). Archivo de la Universidad de Salamanca. Folio 68.

Comunicado en 1861 por el Secretario de la Universidad Literaria de Salamanca a Fernandez-Guerra.<sup>21</sup>

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Salamanca, 25 de octubre de 1600. MATRICULA DE ALARCON EN LA FACULTAD DE LEYES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA.

Libro de matricula de 24 de noviembre de 1599 a 29 de agosto de 1600. Folio 100. Archivo de la Universidad de Salamanca.

Comunicado en 1861 por el Secretario de la Universidad de Salamanca a Fernandez-Guerra.<sup>22</sup>

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Salamanca, 3 de diciembre de 1602. REGISTRO DEL BACHILLERATO EN LEYES DE ALARCON EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA.

Libro de bachilleramientos de todas las Facultades (de 22 de abril de 1598 a 1605), folio 164. Archivo de la Universidad de Salamanca.

Comunicado en 1861 por el Secretario de la Universidad Literaria de Salamanca a Fernandez-Guerra.<sup>23</sup>

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Alarcon continued the study of law at Salamanca for five years, beginning in the first year with reading laws and in the second codification, with the permission of assisting during the next years at the Cátedra de Digesto where he served his apprenticeship during the fourth and fifth years of the course.<sup>24</sup>

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21 Ibid., 513.  
 22 Ibid., 513.  
 23 Ibid., 514.  
 24 Ibid., 26.

According to the regulations of the University of Salamanca, the studies of Alarcón ought to have ended June, 1605. In spite of having taken the necessary courses Alarcón did not obtain his license in Salamanca to practice law in either of the two Derechos. It is possible, as Fernández-Guerra y Orbe affirms<sup>25</sup> that Alarcón could not meet the expenditures entailed with the customary graduation ceremonies at Salamanca, which, besides those of the law university itself, consisted of the dinner in which all took part, tips to teachers, patrons, examiners, ushers, master of ceremonies, and the musicians and clergy of the Cathedral.

Of his life in Salamanca there is no written record except the testimony of one of his classmates, Brician Díaz Cruzate, who a few years later testified at the University of Mexico, February 19, 1609, that Alarcón "ha sido continuo pasante, estudioso, cuidadoso, diligente y inteligente, y que para el dicho efecto ha tenido los libros necesarios."<sup>26</sup> But, as in other instances, the works of Alarcón prove the best source for autobiographical information. He must have passed a happy life with the students at Salamanca, because he celebrates life there with delightful memories in one of his first comedias, La cueva de Salamanca. In this play he happily recalls the jokes and jests of the disorderly students but in the same theme expresses laudable pride at

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<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., 27.

<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., 519.

having passed through its "celebrada atenas" whose learned doctors are "Lux del mundo, honor de España", and as a bachelor of so illustrious a University he is proud because

los bachilleres aquí  
en todas partes lo son,  
que es desta escuela extensión.<sup>27</sup>

However, Salamanca seems to have offered little business to our young law student and we next find him about 1605 in Seville in which city were located relatives of his father and many acquaintances from New Spain. Here he hoped to find opportunities which would enable him to practice law under the protection of some famous lawyer with the hope of training himself for a position in the Council of the Indies. In Seville the ecclesiastical court, the Royal Court and the Casa de Contratacion all offered opportunities to a young canonist or lawyer.<sup>28</sup> Although he did not possess a degree of Licentiate or a legal license, the practice of the times permitted bachelors to practice their legal profession. Here he remained for almost three years.

While working in this capacity, he was frequently aided by an influential relative, Padre Diego Ruiz de Montoya, well known for his saintly life, his learned writings and his work of evangelization of the Indians of Peru and Paraguay.<sup>29</sup> No doubt Alarcón's relationship with such an influential person aided him in the exercise of his profession

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<sup>27</sup> La cueva de Salamanca, Act III, BAE. 98, 100.

<sup>28</sup> Fernandez-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 28.

<sup>29</sup> Reyes, Alfonso, Ruiz de Alarcón, Madrid, 1918. XX.



while he remained in Seville and perhaps it even permitted him to enter into social and literary circles difficult of access to a poor and unknown Indian.

Alfonso Reyes relates an incident of July 5, 1606 when we have the first public proofs of Alarcón's literary endeavors.<sup>30</sup> On this date the feast of St. Lawrence was celebrated at San Juan de Alfarache, near Seville, with a poetic contest, a tournament and a comedia.

It was a day of great celebrating and rejoicing. Breakfast was served at 10:00 A.M. At two in the afternoon the reading of papers for the contest began. Twelve compositions on diverse themes were entered, among which were four decimas written by Alarcón. Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch quotes an anonymous letter written to Don Diego Astudillo Carillo by an eyewitness of the performance in which is given an account of the fiesta of San Juan de Alfarache on the feast of St. Lawrence. In it he quotes the four decimas of Alarcón.

Mientras del mudable otubre  
Al invierno borrascoso,  
Cano el tiempo y quejumbroso,  
El cuerpo de martas cubre  
Mientras el arbol descubre  
A la inclemencia del cielo  
Las ramas, porque su velo  
Hojoso, aunque en el estio  
Resiste del sol al brió  
No puede al rigor del hieló

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Ibid., XXI.

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Hartzenbusch, Juan E., in BAE, op.cit., XXVI.

And afterwards gives a short account of the reaction of the young author.

Muy contento quedó su autor de oír leer estas décimas, como si fueran buenas; en cuya vista fue declarado que, atento que consta haber sudado en hacerlas más que la señora sea afligido a sudar con su autor lo que pareciere ir de más a mas del uno al atro; y si ajustando la cuenta desto, el Juan Ruiz de Alarcón le quedare deudor, sude este el alcance por quince dias continuos en el hospital de San Cosme y San Damian de esta ciudad; para lo cual se nombren dos contadores, y tercero en caso de discordia.<sup>32</sup>

Among other contestants of the occasion were Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Juan de Ochoa, Hernando de Castro, and Diego Jermenez de Enciso.<sup>33</sup> It is reported that Juan Ruiz won over Cervantes by three to five pieces of silver. But the most memorable part of the day was the presentation of the farce "Perseo y Andromeda" followed by a tournament.

No doubt Alarcon often frequented the theaters of Seville. Besides the famous Corrales de Don Juan and Doña Elvira, there were other less important ones functioning at this time. In all these Alarcon could become familiar with the new style of comedia which was fashioned after the style and pattern of Lope de Vega, then master of the theater.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., XXVI.

<sup>33</sup> Fernandez-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 30.

These first years in Seville afforded inspiration for some of his first comedias. This city, after Salamanca, was the one he knew best in Spain. It offered him an insight into all the phases of a turbulent and agitated life, full of encounters and surprises. Here came and went people from all walks in life, the mighty and the lowly, the rich and the poor, the nobleman and the merchantman, with their sudden changes of fortune. Here indeed was the stage where were presented in fullest reality all the complicated intrigues which were then the attraction for the theater in vogue.

However, life here must not have been very promising for the young lawyer for in 1607 we find him making application to return to Mexico. Washe discouraged with seeking employment in Seville or did some event at home solicit his return to his family? We do not know. But on the twenty-fifth of May he applied to the Royal Court for the necessary credentials to return to his native country and a few days afterwards borrowed 400 reales to pay for his passage to the Indies.<sup>34</sup> However, before the permission to embark was granted, don Fray Pedro de Godinez Maldonado, Bishop of New Caceres in the Philippines named him (through the recommendation of Padre Diego Ruiz de Montoya) his servant on the journey to the Indies, thus saving him the expense of the journey. Due to intervention of Dutch pirate ships on the high seas the ship did not sail that year.

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<sup>34</sup> Marín, Rodríguez, op.cit., 8-10.

Alarcón was forced to remain in Seville another year and in 1608 made application for a new license.<sup>35</sup> During the interval between the first and second application, communication was received by means of the flota from New Spain that his father had died, but this did not alter his plans to return to Mexico. It is recorded on the witness statements dated 1607 that Alarcón was at that time "Abogado en la Real Audiencia de ésta ciudad."

He embarked June 3, 1608 in the Master ship, "Diego Garces," under the command of General Lope Diez de Aux y Armendariz. As fellow companions on the journey were Don Fray García Guerra, newly appointed Archbishop of Mexico, and the famous writer, Mateo Alemon. Of this voyage and the sea captain the author makes laudable mention in his play El semejante a sí mismo.

Quando otra pieza de loa  
Me obliga a que desocupe,  
Despedido de mi dueño,  
La nave, y la tierra busque;  
Que la capitana, apenas  
Con el trueno el rayo escupe,  
Quando al viento dan las velas  
La libera pesadumbre,  
Sobre so popa el heroico  
General don Lope, lustre  
De Diez, Aux y Armendárez,  
La cruz y el pecho descubre.<sup>36</sup>

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Ibid., 15-16.

El semejante a sí mismo, Act II, l. BAE, 69.

Two months later he disembarked at Veracruz and undoubtedly accompanied Archbishop García Guerra on the latter's visit to the drainage works in the Valle de Mexico which were dedicated in September of that year. In celebrated verses Alarcón tells of the marvels of his native Mexico and this "natural laguna" and the turbulent rivers which emptied into it. Thus did he show his love for:

Méjico, la celebrada  
 Cabeza del indio mundo,  
 Que se nombra Nueva - España,  
 Tiene su asiento en un valle,  
 -----  
 Todas las fuentes y ríos  
 Que de aquestos montes manan,  
 Mueren en una laguna  
 Que la cuida cerca y baña.  
 Creció este pequeño mar  
 El año que se contaba  
 Mil y seiscientos y cinco  
 Hasta entrarse por las casas;  
 O fuese que el natural  
 Desaguadere, que traga  
 Las corrientes que recibe  
 Esta laguna, se harta;  
 ----- .37

What was Alarcón going to do in this "cabeza del indio mundo"? Would he practice law or dedicate his life to the profession of instructor in law at the University? After presenting a certificate of his work completed at the University of Salamanca he sought the grade of licenciado at the University of Mexico on February 5, 1609, and on February 21, 1609 in the Sacristy of the Cathedral of Mexico he received the degree of Licenciado en Leyes.<sup>38</sup> Following this step

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<sup>37</sup>  
<sup>38</sup> El semejante á sí mismo, Act I, l. BAE, 63.  
 Rangel I, op.cit., 11.

he sought to receive the degree of Doctor of Law but there is no indication that he ever received it.

During the remaining years of his sojourn in Mexico he presented himself several times as a candidate for Cátedra de Instituta or professor of law in the University of Mexico but each time was unsuccessful.<sup>39</sup> For a livelihood he dedicated himself to the exercise of law and according to Fernández-Guerra y Orbe served as Lieutenant Mayor in Mexico,<sup>40</sup> aiding and substituting for Don Garci Lopez del Espinar, Mayor of the city of Mexico. While acting in this capacity he handled cases dealing with the making and selling of pulque, a forbidden liquor, and administered the law against representatives of those houses where it was sold, visiting, seizing and confiscating the goods of the guilty. That he exercised his profession as a lawyer in the Royal Court while Luis de Velasco, Marquis of Salenas was President of the Court and Viceroy of New Spain is recorded in the annals of this city.<sup>41</sup> It is reported that he performed these civic duties with honor and success.

No doubt he wrote for the public of this city and was looked upon with honor and respect. He must have lived with his family, his mother and brothers, except Pedro, who since 1603 was vicario of Tenango, and Hernando, who was curate and ecclesiastical judge of Atenango.<sup>42</sup> Since

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<sup>39</sup> Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 45.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 522.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 523.

<sup>42</sup> Jiménez Rueda, Julio, op.cit., 129.

our poet enjoyed life with friends, it is not difficult to imagine that he would have been received into society, ennobled in the eyes of the high-class Spaniards and rich Creoles, since he had lived and studied in Spain, he would be able to serve as a critic on the subject of the contemporary drama which he had viewed in the theaters of Salamanca and Seville. Undoubtedly he was a frequent patron of the Casa de Comedias which existed in Mexico since 1597.

Did the idea ever occur to him to represent his own drama in Mexico? If it did, undoubtedly he would have abandoned the idea because of the rude, improvised dramatic companies then acting in New Spain and the inadequacy of the theaters in comparison with those of Spain. However, he continued working on some of his dramas, La cueva de Salamanca, and El semejante a sí mismo, the latter almost totally written in Mexico and on some others which he revised and finished on his return to Spain.<sup>43</sup>

About 1612 or 1613 an opportunity to return to Spain was offered to our poet. Should he accept the offer? Would one educated in the life and customs of Salamanca and Seville be ever content to remain in the frontiers of Mexico? The Viceroy, Don Luis de Velasco, whom he knew and who was esteemed by his family left June 12, 1611 to govern in the Council of the Indies.<sup>44</sup> Whether or not he offered aid to Alarcón is a matter for conjecture but it is known that Alarcon prepared for

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<sup>43</sup> Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 44.  
<sup>44</sup> Jimenez Rueda, Julio, op.cit., 151.

his departure from Mexico at the beginning of the year 1613. But with this intention in mind it seems strange that Alarcon should in May of that year enter into competition for the chair of Instructor of Law which was then vacant at the University of Mexico.<sup>45</sup> Did he think it prudent not to take advantage of the opportunity or was it rather that he desired to arrive in Spain with the honorable appellation of Professor of Law in the University of Mexico? Undoubtedly this title would have been most appropriate and advantageous for his pretensions at court. Whatever may have been his intentions, we find it recorded that he entered into the competitions for the position with the opponents Dr. Brician Díaz Cruzate and Agustin de Sedano. The chair was awarded to Díaz Cruzate.<sup>46</sup> A feud arose among the three over the decision. Sedano accused Díaz Cruzate of having bought the votes by dinners and tips. Alarcon brought lawsuit against all accusing them of incompetency and malice. However, before the case opened, Alarcon left for Spain, leaving his lawyers, Pedro Franco and Diego de Villagran to plead his cause.<sup>47</sup>

Alarcon arrived in Madrid sometime in the autumn of 1613 where he undoubtedly associated himself with functionaries of the Council of the Indies under the protection and friendship of Don Luis de Velasco,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>47</sup> Rangel III, op.cit., 56.



who for years had been a friend of the family, being witness to the marriage of his parents in Mexico and for many years a resident and official of that city. Likewise he must have carried letters from officials in the Royal Council in Mexico and from friends and relatives of many in Spain. There existed at that time in Madrid a numerous group of Spanish Indians of a varied social and official position who were closely united by ties of friendship or by a simple common acquaintance.

Among the friends of Alarcon in Spain, besides Luis de Velasco and his fellow-companions from the University of Salamanca, can be numbered Gulierre Marquis de Careaga, later prodigee of Calderón, and Don Diego de Agreda y Vargas, son of one of the members of the Supreme Council and of the Royal Chamber.<sup>48</sup> In this company he was received well for his genius, good humor, and intellectual conversation and he would have enjoyed a life of esteem and loyal friendship but little by little he indiscretely sought higher positions of gain and prestige in the hope of obtaining a post of consequence under the government. He seemed to become preoccupied with the idea of nobility, and like many other Indians of his day dreamed that the Crown owed him something in return for the deeds of his noble ancestors who conquered the American lands or were its first settlers. But he was soon undeceived by the Court for no one seemed to take into account his merits, or if there were those

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<sup>48</sup> Schons, Dorothy, Apuntes y documentos nuevos para la biografía de Juan Ruiz de Alarcon y Mendoza. Madrid, 1929.

who did, they did not have the means of rewarding him. In what way did Don Luis de Velasco, President of the Council of the Indies, or his relative, Padre Diego Ruiz de Montoya, aid him? In what way did his influential friends aid him? We do not know. Neither are we certain of the source of his income in Madrid during these first years. Weeks, months, years passed, and in vain he hoped and waited for a reply from the Court.

What was he to do; whither was he to turn for support and security; would the hopes and ambitions of this poor, mis-shapen Creole foreigner be realized in this fair city? These and many others were the problems facing the young doctor of law as he endeavored to seek his fortune as a pretendent at the court of Spain in the year 1613.

## CHAPTER II

### OFFICE SEEKER AND DRAMATIST IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MADRID

What were the political, social and moral aspects of this seventeenth century Spain in which the Mexican pretendent was to seek his fortune at the court of Madrid?

His Majesty, Philip III, "el Rey santo y perfecto" of the plays of Alarcón, ruled Spain at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In personal character he was weak and indolent, and most of his time was spent at the Escorial in hunting and other pursuits of a country gentleman, while the cares of government were left entirely to his favorite, the Duke of Lerma, who held the office of First Minister of State until October, 1618. During this period, Spain regained somewhat of her former position before the defeat of the Armada, and retained the reputation of being not only a great power but the leading power in Europe. The internal situation seemed highly favorable to continued Spanish predominance.

However, the system of government became very complicated. Philip III entrusted the government to the rule of the Duke of Lerma and later to the Duke of Uceda who absorbed all the power, dispatched all the business and obtained all the benefits for themselves to the detriment of the crown. Important positions were assigned not on the basis of

merit but of favoritism and often at the price of bribery, fraud and embezzlement which tended to enrich ministers and secretaries.<sup>1</sup>

The Councilors became the governing body of the country. These Councilors were: the Royal and Supreme Council of Castille, of Aragon, of Italy and of Flanders, the Royal Council of the Indies, of the State, of the Treasury, of War, of the Chamber of Castille, of the Ordene, and of the Inquisition. Each of these bodies was composed of a president, and various councilors.<sup>2</sup> The expense of maintaining this large governing body naturally tended to exhaust the funds of the government.

The civil authority was exercised in the cities by corregidores and in the villages and towns by alcaldes and assistant alcaldes, by tenientes de corregidores or deputies, who in Seville were called veinticuatros. The authorities were obeyed through the vigilance of constables or officers of the peace who ranked on a level with the former and also added to the expense of government.

The nobility did not constitute so secluded a circle that less fortunates were excluded from its ranks. On the contrary, money, favor, services or relationship served to ennoble a plebeian. As a rule they were a proud, haughty, squanderous class, and as one writer describes them:

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<sup>1</sup> Altamira y Crevea, Rafael, Historia de españa y de la civilización española, Barcelona, 1913. Vol. III. 245-270.

<sup>2</sup> Jimenez Rueda, Julio, op.cit., 118.

Los grandes . . . son crueles y altaneros para con los extraños y menospreciadores de los que poseen un rango inferior al suyo; pero rastreros y aduladores de los reyes y favoritos, guardan entre si una exagerada cortesía y todo su afán consiste en hacer gala ante todo el mundo de sus ceremonias y etiquetas y del sus privilegios importantísimos.<sup>3</sup>

The caballeros followed the nobles and were incorporated into four great military orders:<sup>4</sup> Santiago, Calatrava, Alcántara, and Montesa. But to be a caballero required purity of blood and "informacion de merecimientos."<sup>5</sup>

The hidalgos constituted a class of nobility all their own. They were the descendants of illustrious or ennobled families who did not have the fortunes to sustain the family estates but retained their titles and characteristics of nobility. From such illustrious stock did Alarcon claim descent. He and other writers of his time found it an excellent type for the characters of novel and drama.<sup>6</sup>

The Spanish bourgeoisie was represented by the merchants, the businessmen and the lawyers who together with the doctors and theologians formed a certain class of intellectual aristocracy who lived at the expense of the government or of the church.<sup>7</sup>

On an inferior plane were the soldiers and mercenaries of the time, men with records of adventure, piracy and crime; next, the peasant living

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3 Pfandl, Ludwig, Historia de la literatura nacional española en la edad de oro. Barcelona, 1933.

4 Jimenez Rueda, Julio, op.cit., 121.

5 Ibid., 121.

6 Ibid., 121.

7 Ibid., 122.

in poverty and depravation and subject to the burden of cruel laws and heavy taxation; lastly, the host of traders, peddlers, muleteers, beggars, parasites and crafty scoundrels who wandered the narrow crooked streets of Madrid and other large cities of seventeenth century Spain.

In this mixture of Spanish society was Alarcón to seek his fortune in the city of Madrid in the year 1613, and many of its inhabitants, high and low, were to become the characters of his drama.

The capital, Madrid, a center of wealth and poverty, leisure and struggle, was restored to its rank as capital of this fast declining empire in 1606 and from thence its increase in size and population had been extraordinary. Besides being the artistic and literary center of the world, while the rest of Spain remained sunk in the depths of misery and privation, it was also the meeting place for all classes of strangers seeking favor and business and fortune. In spite of difficulties, lack of comforts and conveniences, many were attracted to the city.

Passing through the Calle Mayor, or the Calle de Alcalá or the Puerta del Sol they would stop to converse with a friend or read the notices of a comedia, painted in great red letters on placards at the corners of these streets. The gossip of the court, the murmurings of ladies and caballeros, the politics of the reign or the triumphs of a comedian were the topics of gossip for idle tongues. In these Calles originated the slanderous epigrams and satire of a Lope de Vega, a Góngora or a Guevedo against the foreigner hunchback who aspired as a pretendent at the court of Philip III.

To obtain royal favor was not easy. One had to court favor of some minister of public office, an act which had its serious difficulties. Surrounded by friends and political associates, they dispensed favors conditionally at the price of bribes and services. Everything went by favor; merit counted for little or nothing. The pretendiente was kept either cooling his heels in anterooms or running about from one courtier to another, seeking to enlist the support of those who might speak for him at the office of the sovereign or this prime minister, until his patience and his resources were alike exhausted. A man of letters had to be content with being the secretary of a minister, a servant of a grandee or nobleman, but even to arrive at so humble a post it was necessary to have a long list of court services to one's account. Consequently only a few chosen ones arrived at the antechambers of the Palace.<sup>8</sup> Here Juan Ruiz de Alarcón was for a dozen years to seek office at the courts of Philip III and Philip IV. Long and laboriously did he pretend as he himself tells us:

¿ Paréceos que vivo yo  
ajeno de pretender  
Al que honor de comer  
en su patria el cielo dió,  
como a vos, nunca pensara,  
que, por servir y rogar,  
sufrir temer, esperar  
el quieto gozar trocara.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Altamira y Crevea, op.cit., 493-500.

<sup>9</sup> La prueba de las promesas. Act II, l. BAE, XX. 439.

Again in El semejante a sí mismo he speaks of his enduring struggle.

En Madrid pretende oficios.  
¿ Con dineros?  
Con servicios.  
Dios le dé pociencia.  
Amen. 10

\* \* \* \* \*

Yo sé muy bien lo que pasa  
un pretendiente en Madrid. 11

For years he dwelt in the household of the Marques de Salinas from whom he sought aid in his endeavors, but the circumstances of compromise became exceedingly irksome to his sensitive spirit, and he expresses this distaste in bitter terms.

Servir es ser desdichado. 12

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Yo sirvo; y diciendo sirvo,  
digo que soy desdichado,  
digo que vivo muriendo,  
digo que me lleve el diablo. 13

All his efforts failed to obtain an office and pressed by necessity to support himself while striving for royal favor he took to writing for the theater.

On his return to Madrid in 1613, Alarcón carried in his trunks manuscripts of some five or six comedias written in Salamanca, Seville

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- 10 El semejante a si mismo, Act II, 5. BAE, XX. 70.  
11 Todo es ventura, Act I, 10. BAE, XX. 122.  
12 Quien engana mos a quien, Act III, 6. BAE, XX. 170.  
13 La industria y la suerte, Act III, 4. BAE, XX. 37.



and Mexico. Newspapers and magazines gave some reference to them but it was not easy to write a work which would merit presentation in the corral of Spain in the seventeenth century.

The Spanish theater had long since been moulded by Lope de Vega. He it was who had created the national comedia, the theater of fantasy, passion, chivalry and lyricism.

There were definite ideas in Spain as to the construction of the seventeenth century drama.<sup>14</sup> The first precept was that it must please the public. By the public was understood a cross section of the total population, the mob who loitered on the streets of Valencia, Seville and Madrid. The aristocrat and the clergyman, the soldier and the student, the lawyer and the picaro, the man of letters and the adventurer, all came to the Corral de la Cruz, the Corral de la Príncipe, or the Corral de la Pacheca to witness their favorite plays and applaud their favorite actors. As Cervantes said, "Los autores que las componen y los actores que las representan dicen que asi han de ser, porque asi las quiere el vulgo y no de otra manera."<sup>15</sup>

The intrigue must be born of a conflict between the feeling and the professional habits of the individuals, between standard norms and general customs.

The Spanish drama was chivalrous, and the Spaniards were then convinced of but one value which was bravery. The caballero was born with

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<sup>14</sup> Chaytor, H.J., Dramatic Theory in Spain. Cambridge, 1923. XI.  
<sup>15</sup> Pfandl, Ludwig, Historia de la literatura nacional española en la edad de oro. Barcelona, 1933. 403.

it; all dramatic actions were founded upon it. The Spanish hero adored first his God, and after that his honor, his king and his lady. Honor was law and it is known that the demands of honor, as well as those of vassallage and gallantry did not always conform to the evangelical law nor to that of right reason and justice.<sup>16</sup> Love was usually passion; there was no gentler motion. Fathers and sons ruled with an iron hand over damsels who were secluded and veiled in the daytime only to admit a lover to their rooms at night. There were no mothers on the Spanish stage as mother love was considered too sacred to appear in the drama. The gracioso was the one to amuse the audience and furnish comic relief. The servant represented his master and helped at the same time to unravel the threads of action.

Such were the elements of the Spanish stage when Alarcon made his first attempts to produce dramas. Alarcon must consider these established norms; he must meet certain requirements. The pundonor, the position of women, a militant patriotism, the spirit of chivalry, none of these could be overlooked. The dramatist might minimize and restrain; this Alarcon did in some respects by shifting his emphasis to character study.

Alarcon could not hope to compete with the fecundity of the great ones of his time, nor to make an impression against Lope's 1000 comedias. He could not impart to the caballero, the dama and the criado that zest

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<sup>16</sup> Chaytor, H.J., op.cit., 15-25.

with which Lope and Tirso created life and passion. He lacked an understanding of love and gaiety, and only on concentrating on nobility of soul could he produce a dramatic theme. Hence he turned to the comedia de morales, subordinating the more complicated romantic intrigue and accentuating the development of character. His legal training, his psychological insight, new to the theater but inherent in him, made it possible for him to portray accurately characters of moral integrity.

The comedia de costumbres was not original with Alarcón. His role was to polish and perfect the genre, used at times by both Lope de Vega and Tirso de Molina. His treatment of the drama was subjective, his characters show a new depth of independence and his theme attacks the moral and social conditions in the Spain of his day.

The productive literary activity of Alarcón covers the period between the years 1615 and 1626. It is possible that some of his early works were written before these dates especially those begun in Salamanca, Seville and the New World. The total of his dramatic production numbers twenty-six authentic works published in two parts, the first in Madrid in 1628 and the second in Barcelona in 1634.<sup>17</sup>

By comparison of style, construction and literary skill and from a study of his Preface to the first collection, scholars have established an approximate chronological order for these early works.

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<sup>17</sup> Jimenez Rueda, op.cit., 151.

<u>El desdichado en fingir.....</u>	)	
<u>La culpa busca la pena.....</u>	)	...written about 1599
<u>La cueva de Salamanca.....</u>	)	
<u>La industria y la suerte.....</u>		1600
<u>Quien mal anda en mal acaba.....</u>		1602
<u>El semejante a si mismo.....</u>		Before 1616
<u>La prueba de las promesas.....</u>		Before Todo es ventura
<u>La verdad sospechosa.....</u>		Written before March 31, 1621
<u>Las favores del mundo.....</u>	)	
<u>Las paredes oyen.....</u>	)	...Represented before
<u>Mudarse por mejorarse.....</u>	)	January 31, 1621
<u>Todo es ventura.....</u>	)	

It is commonly believed that the first six were definitely written before his arrival in Madrid in 1613.<sup>18</sup> No doubt he revised them at this time for the theaters of Madrid and set about to work with enthusiasm on others incorporating in them some of his new impressions and views of life. We do not know definitely when his first plays were presented. Las paredes oyen went to the stage in 1617 but it is not certain whether this was the first or second performance.

In the dedication to the first part of his plays, the author affirms that eight of the dramas contained in the volume had "pasado la censura del teatro."

That he had difficulties with theater managers, who at that time were not accustomed to fulfill their promises, is evident from the record of a law suit in which Alarcón on June 25, 1619, was trying to collect a debt of 500 reales from Juan de Grojales, manager of a theater.<sup>19</sup> According to the tariff of that time a play paid from 200 to 500 reales each.

<sup>18</sup> Jimenez Rueda, Julio, op.cit., 285-293.

<sup>19</sup> Pastor, Perez, Bibliografía Madrileña, III, 465.

Alarcon was little more than thirty years old when he began to be known as a dramatist. He was poor in this world's goods and ill endowed physically, for he had the misfortune of being a hunchback, bow-legged, red haired and heavily bearded. He was "enfermo y feo" and had a wound on the thumb of his right hand. His character seems to have been somewhat embittered by his deformity, his poverty, and by his efforts, so long unsuccessful, to obtain a royal appointment. Frequently in his plays he alludes to his misfortunes. In Las paredes oyen he writes:

¿ cómo podrán  
dar esperanza al deseo  
de un hombre tan pobre y feo  
y de mal talle, Beltran? 20

In Los pechos privilegiados he sadly comments on the value set upon riches to the neglect of moral virtues and shows how keenly he felt what seemed to him to be the injustice of fate.

However, in time he won both recognition in his art and a certain measure of popular success. In July, 1625, La cueva de Salamanca was given in the royal theater and in October of the same year Los pechos privilegiados was performed in the palace at Aranjuez.<sup>21</sup>

However, along with his success, Alarcón incurred the enmity and jealousy of some of the most influential and powerful literary rivals of that time. In 1617 began a series of slanderous attacks against Alarcon, in ridicule of his person, his pretensions to high offices, his plays, and the title of don which he prefixed to his name. Among those who had

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20 Las paredes oyen, Act I, l. BAE. 43.  
21 Rennert, H., op.cit., List in Appendix A.

their fling at him are no less illustrious figures than Góngora, Quevedo, Montalban, Lope and the most bitter of all, the slanderous Suárez de Figueroa who attacked everyone.<sup>22</sup> To the latter Alarcón responded in *Mudarse por mejorarse*, alluding to Figueroa who writes books which "dice en ellos mal de todas . . . y todas dellos y del."

After Figueroa followed Lope de Vega, who in a certain poetical contest of May, 1620, in which Lope was secretary, alluded to Alarcón in disparaging verses. Again in 1623 when Alarcón was asked by some poets to compose the Elogio descriptivo for the feast in honor of Prince Charles of England on the occasion of his marriage to Marie of Austria, cousin of Philip IV of Spain, Lope says,

". . . porque a mi todo me agrada  
so no es don Juan de Alarcón."

The same year Lope was believed to be responsible for having placed in the theater where the El Anticristo of Alarcón was represented a placard stating, "de olor tan infernal que desmayó a muchos de los que no pudieron salirse tan aprisa."

In counter-attack, Alarcón spoke his sharpest retort in Los pechos privilegiados de un "envidioso universal de los aplausos ajenos," and scorns Lope for his immoral life and for his jealousy in the following terms:

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<sup>22</sup> Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 253.

Culpa á un viejo avellanado  
tan verde, que al mismo tiempo  
que está aforrado de martas  
anda haciendo magdalenos.

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Culpa a aquel que, de su alma  
Olvidando los defectos.  
Graceja con apodar  
los que otro tiene en el cuerpo;

And then he replies to his tormentors the beautiful Christian  
acceptance of God's Divine Providence.

Dios no lo da todo á uno,  
Que piadoso y justiciero,  
Con divina providencia  
Dispone el repartimiento.  
Al que le plugo de dar  
Mal cuerpo, dió sufrimiento  
Para llevar cuerdamente  
Los apodos de los necios;  
Al que le dió cuerpo grande,  
Le dió corto entendimiento;  
Hace malquisto al dichoso,  
Hace al rico majadero.  
Próvida naturaleza,  
Nubes congela en el viento,  
Y repartiendo sus lluvias,  
Riega el árbol mas pequeño.<sup>23</sup>

Many are the satires and epigrams, rebukes in verse and in prose,  
which were pointed directly against the Mexican. Among them can be  
found the following of Quevedo, Gongora, Montalban, and Antonio de  
Mendoza.

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23

Los pechos privilegiados, III. 3. BAE. 427.

Satira de Quevedo Contra Don Juan de Alarcón

¿ Quién es poeta juanetes  
Siendo, por lo desigual  
Pina de cirio, pascual  
Hormilla para bonetes?  
¿ Quién enseña a los cohetes  
A buscar ruido en la villa?  
Corcovilla.  
¿ Quién tiene cara de endecha  
Y presume de aleluya?

Decimas satiricas de Gongora a un poeta Corcovado.  
Que se valio de trabajos Ajenos.

De las y fiestas reales  
Sastre, y no poeta seas,

De Don Antonio de Mendoza

Ya de corcova en corneja  
Se ha vuelto en señor Don Juan  
Todos sus plumas le dan  
Para escribir se conseja.  
Parió la monaza vieja  
Monstruos de octavas confusas.

Del doctor Juan Perez de Montalban

La relacion he leído  
De Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón,  
Un hombre que de embrión  
Parece que no ha salido.  
Varios padres ha tenido  
Este poema sudado;  
Mas nacio' tan mal formado  
En postura, troza y modo  
Que en mi opinion casi todo  
Parece del corcovado.

24



His physical defects, peculiarities of temperament, and errors of conduct had no doubt their share in provoking the hostility of Lope de Vega, Quevedo and others, but there is no record of temperamental eccentricities or of demeanor on his part that could justify the brutal jibes and slanders with which these distinguished men attacked him, ridiculing him as a poet, and taunting him in the most heartless fashion with his deformity.

On the whole Alarcón suffered their abuse with remarkable forbearance, yet sometimes he did revenge himself upon his tormentors for the insults they heaped upon him, by making in his plays many allusions to their shortcomings, or by drawing characters which represented them in terms of their characteristic weaknesses or vices. An example of this is the character of Don Mendo in Las paredes oyen, who is said to be drawn from Góngora, Figueroa and the Count of Villamediana.

In spite of Alarcón's desperate struggle, his comedias began to be distinguished among the immense dramatic productions of the period. While he was not a prolific writer, yet he gained more renown with one play than others did with ten. His plays were well constructed and ingenious; his style was sober and beautiful. They began to signify a new course which would in time outmode Lope de Vega. Las paredes oyen and La verdad sospechosa placed him in the first rank of the dramatic authors of the Golden Age.

Alarcón was not destined to labor for long in the literary field. Good fortune was soon to reward his endurance and perseverance and to

end his bitter strife with literary opponents. Soon after 1618 the political situation in Madrid was radically changed with the fall of the Duke of Lerma who for many years ruled not only the will of the King but the destinies of Spain. Things began to change rapidly for the better. There was awakened an interest in political problems, rule of good government and new forms of administration and economy. Alarcon, like many other writers of the time, used his pen to comment on these problems. In this period it is believed that he wrote certain comedias which in some form touched on some of these questions, as La amistad castigada and El dueño de las estrellas. This political change which was favorable to Spain was also favorable to the personal interests of Alarcon. On March 31, 1621 Philip III died, and Philip IV, the friend of the theater ascended the throne. But of much more importance to Alarcón was the rapid change of ministers of state. Don Baltasar de Zúñiga was substituted for the Duke of Uceda and on his death, his nephew, Gaspar de Guzman, afterwards Duke of Olivares, came into power. With him he brought into high official office his son-in-law, don Ramiro Felipe de Guzman, Duke of Medina and President of the Council of the Indies till 1626. He was a kind and affable friend of the arts and patron of young men who wished to enter the dramatic field and he held considerable political and social prestige. Through his influence Alarcon's long struggle as a pretendent at Court was rewarded. On June 19, 1625 Philip ordered the Council of the Indies to report on Alarcón's qualifications and a favorable report was returned July 1. After some delay the King ordered on June 17, 1626,

that Alarcon be given the post of substitute relator of the Council of the Indies, with a right to the first vacancy that might occur. He was sworn June 19, 1626,<sup>25</sup> and from that time the duties of his office occupied him exclusively. His permanent appointment is recorded in the General Archives of the Indies at Seville as received June 13, 1633 from which date he received an annual salary of 120,000 Maravedis. This was quite a contrast to the years spent in poverty and laborious struggle. From this time on he lived amid pleasing surroundings and material comforts and he apparently abandoned the career of a dramatist. The remaining years of his life were thus spent in Madrid.

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<sup>25</sup> Fernández-Guerra y Orbe, op.cit., 430-435.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MORAL THESIS IN THE DRAMA OF ALARCÓN

Various elements entered into the making of Alarcón's comedia de costumbres: first, his legal training acquired in the cultural atmosphere of Salamanca and Mexico, next, the classical studies of his youth, and last but not least, his innate psychology. His legal training enabled him to develop actions clearly and logically and to write concise thoughts. The Classics gave him some unity of action, attention to detail and a certain seriousness of purpose. His innate psychological insight, new to the theater but inherent in him, made it possible for him to portray characters more accurately.

In his drama Alarcón does not compromise or show sympathy for human weakness, as is the case with many of the ancient writers of this type of drama. His is a more stern approach with a definite purpose in view. For him nobility of soul must function as a direct challenge to the weaknesses of hypocrisy and deceit. His characters are not mere types; they portray the author himself, his enemies, and the world of avarice, strife, and frustration in which he lived.

In his own life there had been an abundant opportunity to note the painful effects of lying, greed, slander and the like upon those who were too weak to defend themselves. It was natural then that he should turn to the comedia de morales to develop characters in which he would

exemplify a moral code under which the weak as well as the strong might live with decency and dignity. His own physical afflictions not only shut him away from opportunities of love and adventure, but they also cast a shadow over his theater. Always it was uppermost in his mind, and he constantly endeavored to compensate by substituting greatness of spirit to make up for what nature had denied him.

In the words of Jimenez Rueda, "de ahí nace ese afán, de justificar, con la bellezu del espíritu, la fealdad corporal. Esta amargura se convirtió en la fil sofía que se expresa por la boca de los personajes de su teatro."<sup>1</sup>

That Alarcón spoke through his characters, that he included a moral, is plain. However, his is not the moral teaching of the patient philosopher but of a more severe and purposeful type, his a more pointed and vindictive approach.

Proud of his lineage and his education, he sought to rebuke those who scorned him and to show them that he could succeed. His hopes for this success lay in putting before the public a drama not cut to the pattern of Lope and his followers, but one of a more serious mien, one that would stand forth by reason of contrast and justify faith in his individuality.

The best plays that Alarcón produced are those in which he parried the thrusts of his critics. As a rule, he holds his bitterness well in hand, but when he does ease the check upon his emotions, his resentment

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<sup>1</sup> Jimenez Rueda, Julio, op.cit., 183.

takes command. The enemies of his heroes are the slanderers of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. The evils punished in his plays are those of which he had felt the sting, and the don Juan who emerges with flying colors from the battle against riches, intrigue and physical superiority is the Juan that Alarcón so longed to be but could not reach.<sup>2</sup> Nobility of soul became his creed, slander his obsession and recognition his goal.

Aside from these personal motives, Alarcón's theater had a deeper and more significant purpose. Henríquez Ureña is of the opinion that due to his Mexican background, Alarcón was by nature observant and thoughtful. Be this as it may, at any rate we find in him great capacity for observing the resources which move the conduct of men and women. He understood well that the explanation of their acts is determined by motives which come from within and not by a series of events more or less arbitrary which succeed from without. That is to say, they respond to the fact of being human, not to the resources of the theater itself which makes adventure its principal fount of inspiration. Even in the vices and virtues which his characters possess we note a deeper personal feeling of humanity than is found in the characters of Lope, Tirso de Molina or other dramatists of this period.

The virtues and vices of his characters are not heroic or extraordinary to the point of exaggeration, but rather they are of a type common to the man of the streets of Madrid with its many social classes.

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Las paredes oyen. op.cit.,

They proceed with greater logic in their actions. This deep insight into human nature was derived from Alarcón's legal experiences and his long and arduous struggle for court recognition. Varied and extensive are his contacts with human experience. Friendship, love, jealousy, loyalty, falsehood, ingratitude, slander, immorality, modesty, greed, vanity, self-control, sacrifice, the power of money, sound learning, bravery, kindness, honor -- these and many others are representative of the subjects which he handles in greater or less detail.

Yet his characters are always those of the Spanish theater and never do they abandon their own peculiar character to assume the office of censor or preacher, but rather by making the moral virtue part of their nature it becomes more accessible of imitation. The moral effects which result from characters and from situations are always more common and decisive. Never is there introduced into his theater perverse characters who do evil only because it is evil; on the contrary, their faults are exposed by means of contrast with the good and virtuous.

Well may any of his characters utter the words of the ancient Greek actor when referring to his part in the drama of Terence, "Soy hombre y me interesa todo lo que pertenece a la humanidad."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lista y Aragón, Alberto, Ensayos literarios y críticos. Sevilla, 1844, Vol. II. 61.

## CHAPTER III

### Part A

#### LAS PAREDES OYEN

#### A Condemnation of the Vice of Slander

##### THEME

The scene takes place in Madrid in the Calle de Alcalá. Doña Ana de Contreras, beautiful, noble and wealthy widow with an income of a thousand ducats a year from rents, is loved by two gentlemen who are equal in blood but very different in gifts of nature, fortune and morals. Don Mendo is rich and gallant, but a gossip and slanderer. Don Juan de Mendoza is poor and ill-shapen, but discreet, courteous and affable. Doña Ana loves Don Mendo de Guzman and intends to marry him after the feast of St. John. Doña Lucrecia also loves and pursues Don Mendo but the latter confesses to the Count that he is tired of her persistent enchantments. However, still he continues to write her letters in which he slanders Doña Ana. The Count, who likes Lucrecia, reveals to her the slanderous expressions of Don Mendo. Don Juan despairs of being corresponded with in spite of the fact that his servant, the philosopher, Beltran, assures him that love is blind.

On the night of St. John, Doña Ana returns secretly from Alcalá, and hidden behind the grating of her balcony, listens to the conversation of three gentlemen who pass in front of her window (las paredes oyen!).



One, Don Mendo, is conversing with the Duke of Urbino, a foreigner, who inquires concerning the mistress of a certain house. Don Mendo, in order to discourage this possible competitor, qualifies the owner as "fea, impertinente, y vieja", while Don Juan passionately upholds her gifts and virtues. Such a difference of opinion awakens the curiosity of the Duke. A little later, a letter written by Don Mendo to Lucrecia, in which he speaks disdainfully of Doña Ana, falls into the latter's hands. Indignation reaches its height, and she bids him good-by, and makes ready to depart to the country.

The Duke and Don Juan disguise themselves as coachmen in order to lead Doña Ana to Madrid. Don Mendo, despairing of the change in Doña Ana, determines to attack her on the journey. He bribes the coachmen to stop at a certain place on the road. At the appointed place, he waylays the coach, tries to force Doña Ana from it, and is wounded by the Duke, who also is enamored of Doña Ana. Don Mendo flees for his life.

On arriving at Madrid, Doña Ana suspecting the identity of the two coachmen, detains one of them and discovers that it is Don Juan. The slander and offence of Don Mendo ends by meriting for him the aversion of Doña Ana. At the same time the nobleness and loyal devotion of Don Juan wins her heart.

The Count urges Don Mendo to write to Doña Ana and offers to carry the letter. The Duke for his part has written to the same lady. The Count wins Lucrecia by showing her the letter of Don Mendo; and Doña Ana,

offended by the slander and falsehood of Don Mendo, finally declares that she gives her hand to Don Juan.

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### EVALUATION

The comedia Las paredes oyen is a work most rich in character study. Its moral intention from beginning to end cannot be overlooked. The characters conduct themselves with nature, grace and truth. There is perfect consonance between the characters and the deeds of each one of them. The whole portrays a picture of real life.

In the beginning of the play there are contrasted two lovers of opposite character, but evenly balanced. Don Mendo, the slanderer, has the redeeming characteristics of a winning personality and physical perfection. Don Juan, though patient and wholly without presumption, is physically handicapped. Don Mendo, fortunate galan, represents passion which is expressed in nice formulas, passion which burns as a visible flame. There is in his lovemaking a flowing rhetoric which facilitates matters but is soon recognized as symbolical of deceit and treachery.

Don Juan is the symbol of love which breathes from the depths of a soul, incapable of adequate expression, which poetizes the object loved until it makes it so inaccessible that it renounces even the thought of satisfaction.

Solo sé que os quiero,  
Y que remedio no espero.<sup>1</sup>

When it was discovered that the love of Don Mendo had its set formulas, applicable to all without distinction, as all formulas are, the pure, sincere love of Don Juan gains in comparison. One is an emotion which breathes and devises a good technique; the other is a passion, hidden, difficult of ascendancy and which only discloses itself in expressions and acts of confused significance.

--- Qué es esto, Don Juan?

-- Amor.

--- Locura, dirás mejor.

--- ¿Cuándo amor no fue locura?<sup>2</sup>

It is certain that for Don Mendo all women are equal and he allows himself to accommodate them as his pleasures dictate.

For Don Juan there exists only the woman loved.

Don Mendo is first of all a coward, and so envious that he slanders his rival, Don Juan, whose poverty and ill-shapen figure should have appealed to his generosity. Even Doña Ana, whose hand he is determined to win, does not escape a sneering allusion. He professes to be weary of the enchantments of Doña Lucrecia whom he left to court Doña Ana, yet he continues to assure her of his love.<sup>3</sup> When the Conde, another admirer of Lucrecia, asks him if it would not be better to undeceive her, he answers cynically that he loses nothing by retaining her affection; it will spare him the trouble of winning her again, in case his wandering fancy should return.

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1 Las paredes oyen, Act I, 1. BAE. 44.  
2 Las paredes oyen, Act III, 2. BAE. 56.  
3 Las paredes oyen. "A mi senora Lucrecia."

Not only does he slander, but he even lies. Again on the night of San Juan when passing the house of Doña Ana, he replies to the inquiry of the Duke:

Duke---- ¿Quién vive aquí?  
 Juan--- Una viuda muy honrada y del  
           buen rostro.  
 Don Mendo-Ciego sois o yo soy ciego,  
           o la viuda no es tan bella.  
           Ella tiene el cerca feo,  
           si el léjos os ha agradado,  
           que yo estoy desengañado  
           porque en su casa la veo.<sup>4</sup>

Countless other examples of his slander could be cited but all tend to bring out the same moral so well explained in the philosophic discourses of the gracioso Beltran who further reiterates Alarcón's views on the vice of slander: "What satisfaction can the slanderer have?", he asks his master. "Everyone who hears him, fears him. There are thousands of persons afflicted with other vices, whom people do not hate; but everybody flees from the slanderer."

Despues que uno ha dicho mal,  
 Saca de hacerlo algun bien?  
 Los que el escuchan mas bien,  
 Esos lo quieren mas mal.  
 Que cada cual entre si,  
 Dece, oyendo al maldiciente:  
 "Este, cuando yo me ausente,  
 Lo mismo dira de mi." - - -  
 Viciosos hay de mil modos  
 Que no aborrece la gente,  
 Y solo del maldiciente  
 Huyen con cuidado todos.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>  
<sup>5</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act I, 18. BAE. 48.  
Las paredes oyen, Act III, 5. 57.

Doña Ana is a young widow, honest, rich and unreservedly devoted to Don Mendo, whom she loves with all the loyalty, devotion and constancy characteristic of the heart of a truly noble woman. The force of this love is revealed to us in the struggle which she sustains within herself thus showing the full depth of her human soul, her vigorous and forceful character.

A Don Mendo el alma adorar.

She is delightfully charming with her equals, and kind without condescension to her inferiors, yet touched with faults that make her a real human being. We picture her as short of stature, fine featured, reserved and courteous, beautiful and charming. Her person remains, as it were, in shadow, but through her love her soul shines in resplendent light.

In Doña Ana is witnessed a psychological process, the obstinacy of an assiduous soul and the struggle of the wounded dignity of an offended woman. How is she to deal with the knavery of Don Mendo? In the beginning she is firmly determined to marry Don Mendo and nothing can alter her purpose. When Don Juan enters into the contest she is irritated, angered and vexed, but only with the ugly face and bad appearance.

Solo quitara' el morirme  
Celia, a' don Mendo mi mano  
Que esta el plazo muy cercano  
y mi voluntad muy firme.<sup>6</sup>

At the first clash, when she surprisingly hears Don Mendo slander her, one would think that naturally there would be a break. But on the

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Las paredes oyen, Act II, 18. BAE, 47.

contrary, her love is so firm that still the victory between love and the offence is not decisive.<sup>7</sup> This love for Don Mendo extinguishes slowly and quietly as in life. The process of forgetting is naturally, slowly, and gently drawn out by Alarcón's marvelous scrutiny of the human soul of this woman.

Dona Ana does not hate Don Juan.

Principio es de querer bien,  
El dejar de querer mal.

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Mas bien puedes confiar  
Que el tiempo ira introduciendo  
A don Juan, pues a don Mendo  
He comenzado a olvidar.<sup>8</sup>

However Don Juan does not succeed because she is a fickle, changeable woman, rather it happens because in as much as Don Mendo manifests himself as a knave, Don Juan gains ground in the eyes of Doña Ana for his good deeds and noble actions. In spite of this, her heart is not conquered. The love of Doña Ana is pertinacious, deeply rooted and although it dissimulates through delicacy of feeling, she does not denounce Don Mendo in a moment of determined anger. This phase of the character of Doña Ana is most subtly portrayed by Alarcón with all the skill of an artist having the deepest insight into the human soul. Even crushed with Don Mendo's cruelest act of villainy, the attempt to kidnap her, she replies with displeasure and vexation to the unfavorable expressions which his servant Beltran makes against Don Mendo.

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<sup>7</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act II, 4. BAE, 52.  
<sup>8</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act II, 4. BAE, 52.

Mas esto no da licencia  
 Para que un bajo criado,  
 De hombre tan calificado  
 Hable mal en mi presencia.<sup>9</sup>

It was the last protest of her love of which Beltran and Celia make jest.

Beltran - Mal disimula quien ama.<sup>10</sup>  
 Celia - - Apagado se ha la llama  
 Mas mucha brasa ha quedado.<sup>11</sup>

Finally Doña Ana manages to cure her malady of love by submitting to the dictates of reason and gives her hand to the "feo y pobre caballero don Juan de Mendoza." This act serves two purposes in the comedy, a logical and moral conclusion of the drama and contentment and joy in the soul of the hunchbacked and unfortunate suitor. Doña Ana now enamored is blind to his physical defects. The humorous and mischievous Celia does not lose the opportunity to repeat ironically Doña Ana's own words.

Ay Celia, y que mala cara  
 y mal talle de don Juan!  
 ¿ Ves lo que en un humbre vale  
 El buen trato y condicion?<sup>12</sup>

To which Doña Ana replies:

Tanto, que ya en mi opinion  
 No hay Marciso que le equale.<sup>13</sup>

Celia, the servant of Doña Ana, is a witness of the amorous life of her mistress.

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|----|--------------------------------|------|-----|
| 9  | Las paredes oyen, Act III, 6.  | BAE. | 58. |
| 10 | Las paredes oyen, Act III, 7.  | BAE. | 58. |
| 11 | Las paredes oyen, Act III, 8.  | BAE. | 58. |
| 12 | Las paredes oyen, Act III, 15. | BAE. | 60. |
| 13 | Las paredes oyen, Act III, 15. | BAE. | 60. |

Celia is a true woman in all her details and her words and actions are exactly adjusted to her staunch character. There is in her filial sincerity and good judgment, but at all times she is well balanced and perfectly human. Celia is no sly, crafty councilor who serves for convenience and profit as is often the case with servants. Rather, Celia is intelligent, and she ventures counsel as a woman of years and experience, perhaps too much for her social level, but her words and actions always remain within the realm of reality. At all times she appears natural and administers wise admonitions derived from her keen sense of observation and lucidity of insight. Her words at times have a sound philosophy.

Para los tristes no hay fiesta.  
 En el hombre no has de ver  
 La hermosura o' gentileza:  
 Su hermosura es la nobleza,  
 Su gentileza el saber.  
 Lo visible es el tesoro  
 De mozas faltas de seso,  
 Y las mas veces por eso  
 Topan con un asno de oro.<sup>14</sup>

Hers is a disinterested love for her mistress. When Doña Ana turns against Don Mendo, she tries to place in high light the virtues of the pretendent Don Juan.

Cuán deferente es don Juan!  
 Ofendido y despreciado  
 Es honrar su condicion.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act II, 4. 52.  
<sup>15</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act II, 5. 52.



And again referring to the slander of Don Mendo:

Cuanto el lengua de escorpion  
Ofende siendo estimado.<sup>16</sup>

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¿ Quien asi te injuria ausente  
Y presente lisonjea,  
O engañoso te desea,  
O deseoso te miente;  
Y cuando cumplir intente  
Lo que ofrece, y ser tu esposo,  
Si ordinario, y aun forzoso  
Es el causarse un marido,  
¿ Como hablará arrepentido  
Quien habla así deseoso?<sup>17</sup>

But at the same time she is perfectly human as we find, on the occasion when Don Mendo called her "vieja", her womanly character shows a natural hatred of his habit of gossiping.

Que desde que estando un dia  
Viendate por un reja,  
La cerré, y me llamó vieja,  
Sin pensar que yo lo oía  
Tal cual soy, no lo querria  
Si él fuese del mundo Adon.<sup>18</sup>

In marked contrast, we find Lucrecia, the cousin of Doña Ana, a figure most inevitable in the comedies of Alarcón as well as in other seventeenth century comedies of manner and intrigue. While of equal social standing with her cousin, she is her weaker rival and plays a much less important role. Although she suffers deep affliction from the falsehoods of Don Mendo, still it does not suffice to kill her love and she is content to play second fiddle. She rebukes him, insults him,

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16 Las paredes oyen. Act II, 4. BAE. 52.  
17 Las paredes oyen. Act II, 4. BAE. 52.  
18 Las paredes oyen, Act II, 4. BAE. 52.

but still does not hate him. Her jealousy invents a thousand schemes to win him from Doña Ana. We cannot judge Lucrecia as a staunch and firm woman, but rather as a victim of the deceitful, sly and mischievous Don Mendo. She is differentiated from the heroine by her greater emotionalism and smaller capacity for self control. She lacks experience and the sweet and affable manner of the latter. Her haughty air is at times artificial especially when half-heartedly she disdains him and gives her love to the Count who truly loved her; still loving Don Mendo, she comments:

Mas aunque se apago el fuego--  
Quedan reliquias del doño.<sup>19</sup>

We notice her perversity when she steals by artificial means a letter which Don Mendo has written to Doña Ana and thus satisfies her wounded pride.

Her marriage with the Count in the final act is rather a surprise, and seems a conventional denouncement of her actions. But this is quite consistent with her whole story, for she had been nothing more in the course of the comedy but a suffering patient victim of the cruelties and tortures of Don Mendo, who having lost all hope of winning the hand of Doña Ana, turns his eyes on the disdainful Lucrecia, but she cuts him short, understanding that for lack of a higher object he has chosen her. Therefore she responds to him with the usual haughtiness, rather than from convincing hatred.

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<sup>19</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act III, 12. BAE. 60.

Yo no pienso ser tan necia  
 Que esposa pretenda ser  
 De quien quiere par mujer  
 A la misma que desprecia.<sup>20</sup>

We see in Las paredes oyen many autobiographical reflections of Alarcón himself in the character of Don Juan de Mendoza. Don Juan triumphs over his brilliant and elegant rival through virtues of which our poet feels himself a master, namely, discretion, valor, filial and passionate love, together with malice and ingeniousness to profit by favorable occasions.

The drama as a whole is well balanced and drawn to a natural and just conclusion. In an easy inconspicuous manner the characters have informed the audience of all those points of which they have not been sufficiently aware. It fulfills a definite moral purpose without destroying the main purpose of every drama, delightful entertainment.

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<sup>20</sup> Las paredes oyen, Act III, 17. BAE. 63.

## CHAPTER III

### Part B

#### LA VERDAD SOSPECHOSA

#### The Penalty of Lying

##### THEME

Don García, a student of the University of Salamanca, returns to his home in Madrid. Accompanying him is a young lawyer, whom García's father, Don Beltran, questions concerning the conduct of his son. With great grief he learns of his son's evil inclination of lying which is his sport, his custom, and his sole solution of all difficult situations. Before the vice comes to be known publicly, Don Beltran proposes to have his son married.

On the following day Don García goes for a walk accompanied by his servant Tristan. Arriving at the plaza de las Platerias he meets two beautiful women, Jacinta and Lucrecia. Dismounting from her coach, Jacinta stumbles and falls. Don García assists her, and impressed with this gesture she speaks with him. Impressed with her, he speaks to her of love and among other things tells her that he came from America. He relates that he has been in the court of Madrid a year and has loved her ardently all this while. (In reality he had just arrived the preceeding day.) When speaking of her to his servant Tristan, he is informed that the more beautiful of the two women is Doña Lucrecia.

Thinking that the name applies to the one he loves (Jacinta), an error in identity follows, around which the remaining drama revolves.

Later he is conversing with a friend who tells him that a certain pretendent of Doña Jacinta had given, the night before, a sumptuous fiesta in her honor on the banks of the river. Don García, lying as is his wont, informs him that he was the galan of the fiesta. Afterwards we find Don Garcia speaking with his father who reproaches his son for developing so ugly a vice. Don Beltran tells Don García that he intends to marry him with the beautiful Jacinta. Deceived by the mistaken name, Don García in order to evade the marriage, tells his father that he is already married in Salamanca, and in numerous lies describes the marriage festival in terms of rich fantasy. Don Beltran, although well convinced of his son's capacity for lying, is convinced that his son is married.

Thus the play continues with Don García devising lie upon lie. Don Juan who loves Jacinta is offended and challenges Don García to a duel. However, the duel is suspended because it is clear that on the night of the feast Jacinta loaned her coach to someone else, and that Don García did not leave his house. Jacinta, fearful of the jealous Don Juan, arranges an interview with Don García on Lucrecia's balcony. The conversation is a series of equivocations because the gentleman loves Jacinta under the name of Lucrecia, and the lady, not understanding the equivocation, ends by disprising Don García for his lies, although this time he is really innocent.

Don García insists upon marrying Jacinta, and victim of his errors, he writes a letter to Lucrecia and passes by her home. She, who does not yet doubt the sincerity of the gentleman, makes an appointment with him at Magdalena. Lucrecia and Jacinta arrive. A new error makes the confusion of persons persist, and the equivocations are subtle to the point that the two ladies are mutually suspicious of treason.

Finally, as a punishment for all his lies, he has to renounce the woman (Jacinta) whom he really loves and marry her (the true Lucrecia). Jacinta accepts the hand of Don Juan, and it is then that Don García discovers his error and suffers his punishment in receiving Lucrecia.

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#### EVALUATION

La verdad sospechosa is a study of character, the outcome of which is foretold by García's actions and the manner in which Alarcón interweaves his characters, his motive, his moral code and his denouement.

The figure of Don García fills the whole play, and around his falsehoods and follies is centered all the interest. The story is told with brilliancy, grace and naturalness.

Don García is the type of the universal liar, yet he is not a truly evil fellow and Alarcón does not show his dislike for him. On the contrary, Beltrán, García's father, learns from the lawyer friend that his son is a magnanimous and valiant character.

Es magnanimo y valiente  
 es sagaz y es ingenioso  
 es liberal y piadoso  
 si repentino, impaciente.<sup>1</sup>

Tristan, his servant, who knows him well, laments that these excellent qualities are blotted by the terrible vice of lying.

Tiene un ingenio excelente  
 Con pensamientos sutiles  
 Mas caprichos juveniles  
 Con arrogancia imprudente.  
 De Salamanca rebosa  
 La leche, y tiene en los labios  
 Los contagiosos resabios  
 De aquella caterva moza:  
 Aquel hablar arrojado,  
 Mentir sin recato y modo  
 Aquel jactarse de todo,  
 Y hacerse en todo extremado.  
 Hoy, en término de un hora  
 Echo' conco o' seis mentiras.<sup>2</sup>

He lies more from inclination and habit, moved by a certain presumption of youth, rather than from an evil motive.

Quien vive sin ser sentido  
 Quien solo el número aumenta  
 Y hace lo que todos hacen,  
 En qué difiere de bestia?  
 Ser famosos es gran cosa;  
 El medio cual fuere sea.  
 -----  
 Y al fin, es este mi gusto,  
 Que es la razon de más fuerza.<sup>3</sup>

When he tells his servant that he knows ten languages, Tristan says rightly, "Y todas para mentir no te baston." Don García is incorrigible,

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1 La verdad sospechosa, Act I, 2. BAE, 322.  
 2 La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 5. BAE, 328.  
 3 La verdad sospechosa, Act I, 8. BAE, 326.

for when his own father persuades him to drop this evil practice he defends himself with numerous other lies, and argues with his father thus:

Quién dice que miento yo  
Ha mentido.<sup>4</sup>

García possesses the cardinal virtue of constancy; his love for Jacinta does not vary. His only fault is lying. It was to win Jacinta, first to make himself a hero in her eyes, and then to overcome his father's opposition, that he forged most of his picturesque lies.

But Alarcón endeavors to point out that however "simpatico" the liar may be, however free from harmful intention the lie, it is still a grave defect of character. Through Don García's father, he condemns it unsparingly:

El deleite natural  
Tiene á los lascivos presos;  
Obliga á los codiciosos  
El poder que da el dinero;  
El gusto de los manjares  
Al gloton; el pasatiempo  
Y el cebo de la ganancia  
A los que cursan el juego;  
Su venganza al homicida,  
Al robador su remedio,  
La fama y la presuncion  
Al que es por la espada inquieto;  
Todos los vicios, al fin,  
O dan gusto ó dan provecho;  
Mas de mentir, qué se saca  
Sino infamia y menosprecio.<sup>5</sup>

The author points out clearly that García is not vicious. His lies are not those of slander and malice, for he harms no one but himself, for it is he who suffers rather than society. Lying results in confusion

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<sup>4</sup> La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 9. BAE, 330.  
<sup>5</sup> La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 9. BAE, 330.



and misunderstandings. He cannot, therefore, spare Don García the disastrous consequences which this habit entails and so the ending of the play is hard and forceful.

After Don García the next character of importance is his father, Don Beltran, whose chivalrous attributes add force to the play. The entire plot depends upon him and his reactions to the conduct of his son, not upon his chance willingness to let García choose a wife.

Don Beltran does not arrange a marriage for García until he becomes convinced that it will serve to steady him and induce him to give up his lies. García meanwhile has been thoroughly enjoying himself, making love to Jacinta and spreading fabulous tales about himself. In so doing, however, he violates the code of honor, the one offence that Don Beltran will not overlook.

While Beltran dislikes the thought of his son's falsehoods, he feels that they can be controlled, until they suddenly become a reflection on the family honor. He listens with sympathy to García's account of his supposed difficulties and comes to his assistance, convinced of his love for Lucrecia. But when he finds that his son has lied to him, it is the family pride that has been tarnished, he will not yield an inch and García must himself pay for this dishonor by marrying Lucrecia. Thus Don Beltran proves that he is clearly the typical Seventeenth Century Spanish father, unrelenting and tyrannical.

Beltran:

Vive Dios, si no recibes.  
A Lucrecia por esposa,  
Que te he de quitar la vida.<sup>6</sup>

For Don Beltran there is no other answer. García's word must be his bond, he has given it as a gentleman, now he must be made to keep it. Beltran has told García:

Decid, ¿que sera el hacerlo  
Si vivo sin honra yo?

-----  
Qué naciestes noble, al fin  
Y que soy padre vuestro.  
Pues sin honor puede ganar  
Quién nació sin él, ¿no es cierto  
Que por el contrario puede,  
Quién con el nacion, perdello?<sup>7</sup>

Thoroughly out of patience, he now says:

Yo quiero hablar  
A don Juan, y el cielo haga  
Que te dé a Lucrecia: que eres  
Tal, que ella es la engañada.<sup>8</sup>

And Lucrecia's father adds his similar convictions:

Si vuestra inconstancia loca  
Os ha mudado tan presto,  
Yo lavaré mi deshonra  
Con sangre de vuestras venas.<sup>9</sup>

Alarcón's women are cold and aloof, poised and indifferent. They are the incarnation of good breeding, with a definite mind of their own, but lack the warmth and passion of Lope's women.

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6 La verdad sospechosa, Act III, 14. BAE. 340.  
7 La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 1. BAE. 321.  
8 La verdad sospechosa, Act III, 9. BAE. 339.  
9 La verdad sospechosa, Act III, 14. BAE. 340.

Jacinta is self-confident and independence personified.

Yerran vuestros pensamientos,  
Caballero, en presumir  
Que puedo yo recibir  
Mas que los afrecimientos.<sup>10</sup>

En una honrada mujer;  
Que el breve determinarse  
En cosas de tanto peso,  
O es tener muy poco seso  
O gran gana de casarse.<sup>11</sup>

Lucrecia is not too willing to accept the hand of Don García.

Y si es su amor verdadero  
Por que es digno mi amor,  
-----  
Que estoy por creerie, <sup>dye</sup>  
No por quererie estoy.<sup>12</sup>

The role of the criado de confianza is similar to that which we saw in Las paredes oyen. Particularly characteristic of this type in the plays of Alarcón are the traits of dignity and self assurance. Tristan, friend and confidant of his master, tries to help him, worrying meanwhile lest Garcia be caught.

To García -  
Que cogernos  
En mentira será afrenta.<sup>13</sup>

To Beltran-  
Pues lo peor falta agora  
Que son tates, que podrá  
Cogerie en ellas cualquiera.<sup>14</sup>

The element of deception is the moving force and the basis of intrigue for the play. This device was often used by ancient writers

- 
- |    |                                     |      |      |
|----|-------------------------------------|------|------|
| 10 | La verdad sospechosa, Act I, 5.     | BAE. | 324. |
| 11 | La verdad sospechosa, Act I, 9.     | BAE. | 326. |
| 12 | La verdad sospechosa, Act III, 1-6. | BAE. | 324. |
| 13 | La verdad sospechosa, Act I, 8.     | BAE. | 326. |
| 14 | La verdad sospechosa, Act II, 5.    | BAE. | 328. |

and by Lope himself. Alarcon follows the typical pattern of the comedia de capa y espada which builds its action upon the mistaking of one person for another, and as a result García becomes involved with Lucrecia. Now the father steps in and with a firm Spanish hand guides Garcia to the altar. No technical discovery will step in to help him to regain Jacinta. García's character is the chief concern of the dramatist, therefore García must be denied what he wants most. This is the crux of the play, that by lying García has created a situation that robs him of his freedom. Such an outcome is not only the result of Alarcón's moral ideas; it is in line with his psychology of character study and his idea of dramatic development.

The celebrated French poet, Pedro Corneille, presented this drama to the French theater under the title of the Menteur. The French considered it as the first dramatic comedy worthy of the name. Voltaire called Corneille the founder of the French tragedy by virtue of his work, the Cid, of the comedia by the Menteur, of the opera by the Psiquis.<sup>15</sup>

The French drama copied all the stories and intrigues of the Spanish Don García but with great discernment. However, Garcia, instead of feigning the role of an Indian, when seeking the hand of Jacinta, pretends to be an official who has been cited by Louis XIV for his valor and noble deeds. Each author has well adapted the play to the customs and manners of his own time and country.

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<sup>15</sup> Lista, Alberto, Ensayos literarios, Vol. II, 180.

Corneille, in the dedication of his play, the Menteur, admits that it is in part a translation and in part an imitation of the Spanish work and that he finds Alarcón's subject so ingenious and so well planned that he has said many times that he would have given two of his best works in exchange for having written this one.

El argumento de esta pieza me parece tan ingenioso y tan bien manejado, que segun he dicho muchas veces y ahora lo repito, daría dots de mis mejores composiciones, porque fuese invencion mia. Se ha atribuido al famoso Lope de Vega; pero hace poco que llegó a mis manos un tomo de Juan de Ruiz de Alarcón, en el cual la reclama este autor, y se queja de los impresores que le han dado a luz bajo otro nombre ----. Sea de quien fuere, es ingeniosísima, y nada he leído en español que me haya gustado mas----.<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### Part C

#### GANAR AMIGOS

#### Loyalty in Friendship

##### THEME

In Seville during the reign of King Don Pedro el Justiciero, Don Fernando de Godoy, the lover of Doña Flor, kills in a duel the one who strives to remove him from the window of his lady love. On fleeing he meets with the Marquis Don Fadrique, minister of the king and also suitor of Doña Flor. Don Fernando solicits and obtains his protection. However, when the law presents itself, the Marquis is informed of the death of his own brother. In spite of the affront he fulfills his word and keeps the stranger in safety.

When Don Fernando refuses to explain that which took place at the lady's window, the Marquis challenges him to a duel and conquers him. Although conquered, Don Fernando keeps silence. The Marquis, moved by his noble procedure, pardons him and offers him his friendship.

The king, aware of the fact that one of his nobles, Don Pedro de Luna, is violating the decorum of the palace by enjoying liberties with a lady of the court, asks the Marquis don Fadrique to have him put to death in secret. But the Minister, in order to give the king time to relent, offers the transgressor command of the troops in Granada, which the latter refuses because he believes that Don Fadrique only wishes to

remove him from the favor of the king. The Marquis, backed by the agreement of the State, convinces the Monarch to send Don Pedro de Luna to Granada.

Doña Ana intercedes with the Marquis in favor of the forgotten Doña Flor. Don Diego, brother of Doña Flor, and suitor of Doña Ana overhears a conversation and supposes that Doña Ana and the Marquis are in love. He then takes the pleasing vengeance of forcing his way into the home of Doña Ana, pretending that he is the Marquis. Doña Ana complains to the king of the offence received. The Marquis is taken prisoner. His enemies accuse him of the offence, that through jealousy of Doña Flor he commanded the death of his own brother. Don Pedro de Luna returns triumphant from Granada, and knowing that he owes his life to the Marquis, offers to take his place in the prison. However, the Marquis refuses.

Don Fernando and Don Diego confess that they are guilty of the crimes which are attributed to the Marquis. The king, proud of such valor and nobleness, pardons all and concedes to Don Pedro de Luna the hand of the girl whom he visited in secret. Doña Ana marries Don Diego and Doña Flor, the Marquis.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### EVALUATION

In play after play of Alarcón, loyal gentlemen prove their friendship for one another in different ways. Next to honor, friendship occupies the highest place in his theater.

In Ganar amigos the virtues of friendship and loyalty are put to the test in extreme situations, contrasting them vigorously with fraternal devotion, love, jealousy, political rivalry and even with the preservation of life. In this play, life itself is offered by Don Fernando to rescue a friend.

Ganar amigos contains two outstanding examples of the regard which a gentleman has for his word. They are Don Fadrique, who is also a Marquis, and Don Fernando. A strange fate brings them together. Don Fernando, fleeing from the police, meets the Marquis and begs the nobleman to save him. He admits that he had killed a man in a street duel. The Marquis first inquires, "Fué bueno la muerte?", and once assured that the combat had been fair, he promises to protect him. At that moment the police come up and inform the Marquis that the slain man was his own brother. Don Fernando, hidden behind the cloak of his protector, hears him bid the pursuers pass on. He is almost overcome by such magnanimity and falls to his knees. The Marquis tells him to rise, nor will he permit Don Fernando to thank him for what he was in duty bound to do.

Caballero, levantaos  
No me deis gracias por esto,  
Supuesto que no lo hago  
Yo por vos, sino por mi,  
Que la palabra os he dado  
Cuando os la dí, os obligué;  
Que es pagar mi obligacion,  
Y nadie obliga pagando.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ganar amigos, Act I, 9. BAE, 343.



One has no right to impose conditions after giving a promise. When the Marquis, who is enamored of Doña Flor learns that the duel had occurred in front of her window, he insists on knowing Don Fernando's name and learning what the latter was doing there. But Don Fernando had given his word to Doña Flor that he would keep their courtship a secret, and refuses to reveal his identity.

Prometido habeis librarme,  
Y a vos mismo he escuchado  
Que el haberlo prometido  
Basta para ejecutarlo.  
Advertid que no lo haceis  
En pidiendo nada en cambio;  
Que ponerme condiciones  
Es modo de quebrantar.<sup>2</sup>

He deems it a most sacred duty to guard the secret of one's lady. Don Fernando assures the Marquis, who continues to question him, that Doña Flor is innocent, and then he adds:

Luego, como caballero  
Y galan, me decid vos  
Si, dado caso, que fuera  
Yo, tan dichoso, que hubiera  
Secretos enter los dos,  
¿Diera el descubrillos fama  
A mi honor, si es, segun siento,  
Inviolable sacramento  
El secreto de la dama?<sup>3</sup>

And when Don Fadrique argues in behalf of what he is and what he has done for him, he firmly maintains the validity of a secret.

#### Fadrique

Pues si callar os prometo,  
El ser quien soy ¿no me abona?

---

<sup>2</sup> Ganar amigos, Act I, 9. BAE, 344.  
<sup>3</sup> Ganar amigos, Act I, 12. BAE, 346.

Fernando

No hay excepcion de persona  
En descubrir un secreto.  
En vano estais profiando.

Fadrique

. . .de Doña Flor  
Os ha obligado el honor.

Fernando

No me obliga sino el mio  
Ni temo que sospecheis  
De su honor por eso mal  
Que sois noble, y como tal  
La sospecha engendraréis.<sup>4</sup>

Irritated by the silence of Fernando the Marquis determines to force the secret from him and drawing his sword at him and Fernando replies:

Resuelto á callar estoy.

Fadrique

¿ Que os resolvéis en efeto  
Si con la muerte os obligo,  
A no decirlo?

Fernando

Conmigo  
Ha de morir mi secreto.

The Marquis, astonished at so courageous and noble loyalty, grants him his life and adds:

Fadrique

Levantad, ejemplo raro  
De fortaleza y valor,  
Alto blason del honor,  
De nobleza espejo claro.

Vivid:-----  
 Guardaos, si viene a saberse  
 Que fiustes vos mi ofensor,  
 Porque en tal caso mi honor  
 Habra de satisfacerse;  
 Mientros no, para conmigo  
 No solo estais perdonado,  
 Pero os quedare obligado,  
 Si me queréis por amigo.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to find a man as noble as Don Fadrique. He shines out above all the characters as the manifestation of the noblest of virtues, force of soul, and the ideal and perfect friend. Don Fadrique was not a monarch, yet he manifests all the magnanimity and nobleness of that office.

Don Fernando, loving and jealous, is almost equal to the Marquis, for he would rather lose his life than reveal the secret of a woman he loves.

Resuelto a callar estoy.

-----  
 Con migo  
 Ha de morir me secreto.

Don Pedro de Luna, ever attentive to the vibrations of political ambition, is, nevertheless, a specimen of ideal heroism which fires and burns the imagination. He hates the Marquis because he believes that for envy the latter wishes to send him to Granada, but when he is undeceived and realizes the debt he owes to Don Fadrique, he is a hero, and does not hesitate for a moment to lose public estimation or even life itself to save his loyal friend.

In the character of Don Pedro are seen in fullest splendor all the eminent justice and righteousness of a noble Spanish king. In him are

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<sup>5</sup> Ganar amigos, Act I, 12. BAE, 346.

embodied all the popular traditions representative of the Spanish race and epoch.

Doña Ana and Doña Flor are less outstanding than some of Alarcón's other women. Doña Flor is the motive of the intrigue and later causes the imprisonment of the Marquis which produces the plot of the play. She is a little more coquettish than Doña Ana, but both are models of honesty, sincerity and amiability. Doña Ana illustrates the true friend, the model of feminine loyalty, and reminds us somewhat of the heroines of the Greek theater.

The drama, Ganar amigos, is well written and the dialogue corresponds in each case with the noble sentiments embodied in the play. In it are assimilated all the chivalrous sentiments of the epoch, the respect for the honor of women, the sacrifice of life in favor of friendship and of reputation, all the generous love proper to that country and epoch. The intrigue is well planned and directed. All the characters have sufficient opportunities and reasons to work out their actions in accord with their personal interests, and if they do not do it, it is because friendship holds over them the power of an ethical norm. It is the dominating factor in all situations of human interest and transforms their selfish interests into deeds of generosity and sacrifice. In this atmosphere and under friendship's powerful influence, the king, Don Pedro the Cruel, forgets his cruelty and responds to the noble and generous example set by his ministers. Although all the characters gradually

ascend through the comedia to this higher plane of human perfection where generosity and nobleness reign supreme, each one does it without violating his character, thus bringing Alarcón's work into perfect conformity with the canons of the Spanish drama.

## CHAPTER III

### Part D

#### LA AMISTAD CASTIGADA

#### The Vice of Disloyalty

##### THEME

Dionisio II, King of Sicily, who owes his throne to his brother-in-law Dion, falls in love with the latter's daughter, Aurora. Not being able to restrain his passion, he determines to satisfy it at all cost. As the arbitrator of his love making, he chooses a certain Felipo, who was previously banished from the court and now returns for the first time. Felipo visits the lady, Aurora, on behalf of her uncle, and although he fulfills his commission and is dismissed in anger, he is blinded by her beauty and also falls in love with Aurora. There are two other suitors whom she likes very much, Policiano and Ricardo. Policiano wishes to marry her and Dion gives his consent, but the king prevents the marriage with various protests.

Ricardo also loves Aurora and knowing that she is promised to Policiano asks counsel of her sister, Diana, who obtains the royal disapproval against the projected marriage. Ricardo asks for the hand of Aurora, not knowing that the king loves her; but Dion, desiring to prove his loyalty, tells him that he has the king for a rival. Ricardo, a faithful vassal, then renounces his hopes.

Felipo is bearer of a second message from the king. Of all her admirers, Aurora prefers Felipo, and in a second conversation obliges him to declare his love. Felipo, traitor to the confidence of the king, tells Dion of the king's secret passion for Aurora and in reward for this and other information seeks the hand of Aurora for himself.

Dion unites the nobles of Sicily and presents himself to the king when the latter, aided by a disloyal servant, arrives at night in Aurora's chamber. They draw swords and Ricardo heroically defends the king. Policiano asks for the death of the monarch. The king sees himself forced to abdicate in favor of Dion. Thus is verified in Felipo the title of amistad castigada, and Dion has him banished for betraying his friendship and fidelity to his king. Ricardo, the only one of all her lovers who remained loyal to the king, wins the hand of Aurora. Policiano is obliged to fulfill his promise of marriage which he had formerly given to Diana. The servant fulfills his office well, for, although disloyal to his master, he was always faithful to his king.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### EVALUATION

While Alarcón's propensity to treat of a moral thesis in the drama is significant in La amistad castigada, the work and the manner in which the author accomplishes his purpose is by far inferior to that of La verdad sospechosa and others.

The theme is that of disloyal friendship. Does friendship justify an act of disloyalty to the king? The intrigue is constructed to demonstrate the fact that not even in the case of a bad king can the reasons of friendship justify disloyalty to one's monarch. Moreover, in this play, the servant, Ricardo, who is traitor to his master in order to obey royal caprices is rewarded; and a vassal, contrary to his own personal interests, comes to the defense of a monarch guilty of base meanness. Blind, unconditional loyalty to one's king is the norm for judging the conduct of four of the main characters of this drama. Alarcón has so complicated the case of each one of them that the final distribution of punishments and recompenses does not surprise the reader. The conflict between loyalty to one's sovereign and the forces of friendship is not well planned because Felipe is not a noble character nor does he represent a true friend. Furthermore, friendship lies in order to justify an unworthy act. Before seeing Aurora, he aids and advises Dionisio in every way possible to satisfy his passion, but after he falls in love with Aurora himself, he immediately turns traitor to the confidence which the king had placed in him. Dion, to punish Felipe, does nothing more than confound false friendship with truth.

Alarcon never brings out in dramatic terms any soul-stirring spiritual struggle between the obligations of a loyal vassal and a true friend but rather bluntly causes the characters to act against reason without any meditated motive.<sup>1</sup> This is the principal defect of the play.

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<sup>1</sup> Lista, Alberto, Ensayos literarios, in BAE, 524.



Felipo is neither a good vassal nor a good friend; nor in order to be a good friend does he renounce being a good vassal. That which is punished in him is not friendship which sacrifices all, but treason which tramples all personal opposition underfoot.

Neither is the character of Aurora outstanding. Although discreet and beautiful, when she decides in favor of a heart as vile and traitorous as Felipo's she loses ground in the reader's estimation.

Ricardo, though low and vile in many respects, in all instances remains loyal to the king, --thus it is he who wins the final reward, the hand of Aurora, in order to maintain the thesis that fidelity to the king is above every other concept even devotion and honor to one's loved one.

There is a noted contradiction in the political moral of Dion at the end of the drama. Felipo's treason to his king is censured and punished, but he does not hesitate to take the crown from the same king and banish him, and if he does not take his life it is because of the interest for Aurora.

Thus we see that all of the characters are faulty and this is one of the greatest defects a dramatic composition can have.<sup>2</sup>

The dialogue lacks lively inspiring passages as we find in some of Alarcon's other works. There is only one scene, the last of the second act, which interests and excites attention, and then not so much for the moral merit of the characters as for the vivacity and force of the dialogue.

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<sup>2</sup> Lista, Alberto, Ensayos literarios, in BAE, 524.

## CHAPTER III

### Part E

#### LA PRUEBA DE LAS PROMESAS

#### Condemnation of Ingratitude

#### THEME

The scene takes place in Toledo. To end the strifes between his family and that of the Várgas, Don Illan of Toledo wishes to marry his daughter, Blanca, with Don Henry de Várgas. The young lady, however, likes Don Juan de Rebera, who in order to enter her house and see her asks to take lessons in magic from her father, Don Illan, who is noted for his knowledge of this art. This is denied, but Don Juan insists, offering Don Illan his property and any power which he has acquired.

que siempre vuestra ha de ser  
mi hacienda, vida y poder,  
cuanto valgo y cuanto soy.

In order to prove the truth of these promises and to combat the inclination to Blanca, Don Illan appears convinced and proposes to give the first lesson. In the meantime a servant arrives to announce the arrival of a new horse which Don Illan's brother had sent him. They all go down to see it and Don Illan orders it to be saddled so that Don Juan can try it out, and they enter his study to await what will take place.

From this point Don Illan begins his magic operations. A messenger appears with letters for Don Juan advising him of the death of his older brother, the Marquis of Tarifa, a son, and a second brother. Thus it

resulted that Don Juan was heir to the title and vast riches and possessions. Don Illan, admirably pleased with this change of fortune, asks of him the office of corregidor for his lawyer son. Don Juan does not correspond well to this first test of his promises, but, on the contrary, refuses, announces his departure for Madrid, and asks Blanca and her father to follow him.

In the second act we have the court scene. Don Juan fulfills neither his old nor his new promises. Don Juan each day mounts in favor with the king, who finally makes him president of the Council of Castille, and although he continues to love Blanca, he no longer considers marrying her. She is grieved with the fickleness of the gentleman, and, wishing to provoke his jealousy, causes a servant of Don Juan to listen to a conversation in which she gives Don Enrique frank hopes.

Don Illan solicits for his son, Mauricio, one of the two robes which the king has given to Don Juan. Don Juan refuses because the youth is only a letrado.

One night Don Enrique goes to Blanca's balcony and it happens that she confuses him with Don Juan with whom she has made an appointment, and speaks to him of her marriage. When Don Juan asks questions she discovers her error; the gentleman for his part does not wish to endanger himself by marrying her. Don Illan and Blanca seek license to return to Toledo and come to bid good-bye to Don Juan, complaining of the falsehood of his promises. Don Juan is indignant, replies with insolence, denounces Don

Illan, accusing him of being a bewitcher. At this moment Don Illan dissolves the charm, and the servant announces that the Andalusian colt is saddled. Don Juan goes away running and Enrique marries Blanca.

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### EVALUATION

As in many other dramas of Alarcon's theater we also find a moral thesis in La prueba de las promesas. Here is an excellent apology planned to present a very old but very certain truth: that there is little security in the promises of men, or in their gratitude for benefits received, especially if the situation varies and fortune flatters them.

The theme of the play was taken from the story of Don Juan Manuel's Conde de Lucanor.

Al que mucho ayudares et non telo  
conosciere menos ayuda avras,  
desque en grand honra subiere.<sup>1</sup>

This was the advice given by Conde Lucanor and it is the same moral that gives Alarcon a basis for his play.

The unworthiness of the Don Juan of this drama is exceptional, as Alarcon in most of his plays made his own name the synonym for nobility and honor. Juan learns his lesson well, thus giving the author an opportunity to draw a character strong enough to accept discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> BAE, Vol. XX, 547.

Gossip is once more rebuked:

Tristan:

Algun testimonio fué  
De cualquier lingua envidiosa  
-----  
Aquel es murmurador  
Que divulga falsedades.<sup>2</sup>

The author creates for his intrigue a most delightful atmosphere in which the reader is almost totally unaware of the transition from the real to the fantastic, of the separation point where life ends and magic begins. This artful technique is one of the most skillful features of the composition.

Parallel to the rivalry of the gentlemen who are in love with Dona Blanca there is unfurled on another plane the rivalry of the servants who are in love with Lucia. In both Don Juan and Tristan the ambition of bettering themselves in a new state struggles with the inclination of the heart because

. . . con la ambición y con la ausencia  
pierde las fuerzas el amor mas ciego.<sup>3</sup>

Lucia, the servant, whose wisdom is comparable to that of Celia in Las paredes oyen, stops to explain in a very meaningful sonnet that the opposition between love and interest never did succeed very well.

Tristan, amor se precia de humildades  
Abata el que ama el levantado vuelo  
O no le engendren quejas los desdenes  
si siendo enamorado es ambicioso.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> La prueba de las promesas. Act II, 6. BAE. 442.  
La prueba de las promesas, Act III, 1. BAE. 441.  
La prueba de las promesas, Act II, 13. BAE. 443.

At the end Tristan is pardoned and Don Juan suffers the punishment of losing Dona Blanca because that which in the servant is inexcusable knavery is in the senor a grave fault.

In many respects this play is similar to Las paredes oyen. In both the preferred gentleman provokes his own ruin and the one who at the end is found worthy is the true lover, i.e., he who places nothing before his devotion. We see in both plays a similar type of a servant, confidente.

It is in this drama that Alarcón defends himself against the slanderous attacks of some contemporaries directed against him for having prefixed the title don to his name.

Si fuera en mi tan reciente  
la nobleza como el don  
diera á tu murmuración  
causa y razón suficiente;  
pero si sangre heredé  
con que presumo y blasone  
¿quien quitará que me endone  
cuando la gana me dé?

-----  
Es accidente del nombre,  
Que la nobleza del hombre  
Que le tiene nos publica

-----  
Luego si es noble, es bien hecho,  
Ponerse don siempre un hombre,  
Pues es el don en el nombre  
Lo que habito en el pecho.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From this analysis of Alarcón's dramas it is evident that in his works were fulfilled all the essential canons of the Spanish drama. Adventurous galants, discrete lovers, interesting ladies who are changeable and false, preferring money to love, titles of nobility to talent, and love to devotion, all typical of the Spanish drama, make up his role of characters.

In all of Alarcón's works we note the art of entertaining which is the soul and first essential of dramatic poetry. But over and above this, all his comedias breathe a moral purpose and all are distinguished by an admirable economy and simplicity of action which does not tend to slacken nor lessen the element of interest.

Fundamentally, Alarcón's drama is a drama of characters, not of intrigue. His method is to create and introduce into his play a character type and through this type to develop a moral thesis. In the determined characters are personified distinct virtues and vices. There is always intrigue enough for the characters to move, work, and speak, but the essential is not the intrigue itself. The predominating factors are the characters and the moral ideas for which they stand, thus leaving the intrigue to be a mere mechanism by which they discover and reveal themselves to one another. These characters are always real, the good as

well as the bad. Noble birth, courage, courtesy, skill in manly arts, were all in the set formula of the perfect courtier. But Alarcón's moral intention leads him to dwell more on the interior graces of the courtier, upon his nobility of soul not less than upon his noble birth; also upon the sacred duty which friendship lays upon him. Little by little through their words and actions do his characters live and act out their lives, manifesting their true interior natures. Often the moral lessons are in the words, particularly of secondary characters. Moral maxims, terse and salutary, are blended into the dialogue with extraordinary skill.

A profound religious principle tinged with Stoicism is the basis of Alarcón's morality. Evil is always punished, because it is against Divine as well as natural law. The sense of human dignity stands out in bold relief in all his works. In an epoch of immoralities, artificialities and appearances, when individuals were valued for as much as they possessed, Alarcon, the poor unfortunate hunchback, dared to affirm through his drama the subjective value of man - the theory that each human being is worth as much as he is and not as he appears or according to what he possesses. Neither birth, nor titles, nor riches, nor relations are enough to make a scoundrel a decent person, nor a knave a gentleman. A poor man can win honor and be a perfect gentleman; a gentleman can merit dishonor and become a despicable fellow.

The moral of Alarcon is the moral of sincerity and truth. All other virtues result from this cardinal virtue. Likewise all vices



flow from the cardinal vice of lying and its twin sister, hypocrisy. His drama is a drama of moral triumphs. Triumphs, we say because the destruction or failure of the immoral are also moral triumphs. The greatness of his moral character is not the tragic greatness of those who are unjustly conquered, but a triumph affirmed when the moral character ends as the victor; a negative triumph when the immoral character is conquered. Generally the triumph is double, for in almost all his dramas there are moral and immoral characters, so there are also victors and vanquished, recompenses and punishments.

Furthermore, he reduces the proportions of his drama to the limits of true humanity. The struggles, the self-controlled actions, the turbulent intrigues, the words, are all reduced to moderate behavior in his work. The sentiments are more natural, the manifestation of ideas more intimate, strifes are reduced to a minimum, there is cordiality in his human relations.

There is logic, order and symmetry in his drama. It is not a case of multiplying the scenes whimsically with the sole intent of diverting the mob. Before he begins to write, Alarcón determines well through what channels he is going to lead each character. He does not introduce two or three plots into one piece, but limits each to a principal action, and if the construction is not always as solid as could be desired, nevertheless each scene is justified by the unfolding of the

drama and by the end in view. So skillfully does he weave all, even his ethical code, into his plays that practically nothing could be removed without marring their artistic unity.

Very seldom did Alarcón choose for his plays themes which were far from Spain. Rather his subjects were relative to the Spain of his day, the culture of his epoch and of future epochs. Never does he venture very far beyond the limits of his theater, but he is singularly modern in his views. In contrast to those of his contemporaries, his works are moderate and temperate, void of the sentimental hyperbolism of the seventeenth century.

Henríquez Ureña, in speaking of Alarcón's drama, says,

In the Alarconian world the turbulent life was softened by the absence of perpetual struggle and intrigue, which reins in the drama of Lope and Tirso, just as life in colonial Mexico was much more tranquil than in the metropolis of Spain. The scenes of his plays are more often in the house than on the street; there are fewer duels, more discretion and tolerance in human conduct; human relations are more affectionate, more natural and more intimate with less show of conflict.<sup>1</sup>

His versification is most simple and musical with a diction more exact than picturesque. He always adapts the language and dialogue to the character of the person. The dialogue is lively and interesting, full of grace and wit. All his arguments and situations are new and original with him.

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<sup>1</sup>

Ureña, Henríquez, Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. Nosotros, Mexico, 1914. IX.

Alberto Lista says of him that no dramatist of Spain has given more sincere and constant expression to his respect for women. All the beauties of creation are assimilated in his idea of womanhood.<sup>2</sup>

According to Barry,

Alarcon es el mas moderno y el mas igual entre los poetas dramaticos de us siglo y tambien el que presenta mas cosas dignas de admiracion. Alarcon es superior a Lope, Calderon, y Tirso, por la emocion, por la seleccion y variedad de los asuntos, por la naturalidad del dialogo, por la verosimilitud de la fabula, por la moralidad del fin, por la sobriedad de los medios y de los adornos, en fin, por la correccion sostenida de un dialogo que es, despues de tres siglos, uno de los mejores modelos que hoy que senalar a la imitacion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lista y Aragon, Alberto, Ensayos literarios y criticos Sevilla, en Biblioteca Autores Espanoles, Vol. XX. XXXIX.

<sup>3</sup> Barry, Edward, La verdad sospechosa. Paris, 1904. XI.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Mary Madeline (Walsh) has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Spanish.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 23-49

Date

G. Salvador

Signature of Adviser